

four

Quarters

published quarterly by the faculty of la salle college

- The Brave Fool • Page 1
A Short Story by George W. Smyth
- On Dit • Page 5
A Poem by Jan Michael Dyroff
- The Other War • Page 6
A Short Story by Michael Lee, F.S.C.
- Too Late to Bow • Page 15
A Poem by Judy Dunn
- Chekhov in Erin: Sean O'Faolain's
Career As Short Story Writer • Page 16
An Article by Paul A. Doyle
- Two Poems • Page 21
From Red to Red
Bitter Poem (Almost)
by Paul Kelly
- And Pride and Stubbornness Remain • Page 22
A Short Story by Elizabeth Shafer
- Stages of Death • Page 34
A Poem by John Fandel
- The Shy Lovers • Page 34
A Poem by John A. Lynch
- Mr. Acton's Final Role • Page 35
A Short Story by Todd R. Zeiss

January, 1968
vol. XVII, no. 2 • fifty cents

The Brave Fool

• George W. Smyth

He was called *El Bobo*. His real name was Rafael de la Cruz, and he was an apprentice bullfighter, a *novillero de toros*. Whether his pursuit appeals or not, his story is honest and manifest, as true as the world of his art, as genuine as the very special world of his being, a frustrating and inarticulate world of forces within and voices without, mingling, pulling, calling him up, striving, straining, from silence.

His managers, and he had three, had handed him the name *El Bobo*, meaning The Fool, or The Silly One, in an effort to gain some publicity for him. It was their idea that the public, and the newspapers with their all-important bullfight critics, would remember such a ludicrous name more easily than not. Rafael had fought in four fights in the current season, now nearly over, and had shown a promising style and considerable courage, although he was still unknown among all the newspapers and most of the public, despite the absurd and funny name.

His three managers, however, had great hopes for him. It had been something of a risk to take on such a young one, but they did realize, at least, that his twenty years of age belied the experience he had gained in numerous smalltown fights with the strange, erratic, hugely mystifying ways of the big fighting bulls. The investment was paying them well enough. *El Bobo* had earned ten thousand pesos in the current sea-

son, about eight hundred dollars, and the managers had taken only half this amount; Rafael, when he considered money matters from the depths of his private world, thought this to be fair. The truth was he thought little of money: his needs were hardly more than those of a child.

But he felt that this Sunday afternoon in the huge bull ring, Plaza Mexico, where he was fighting a *mano a mano* fight with another apprentice, he was sadly disappointing his managers, who trusted him so much, put such faith in him. He felt that he was living up only too well to the meaning of his professional name, and, after all, it was only supposed to be a name to draw some attention to him in these hard and theatrical times of bullfighting, not to the way he fought the bulls. His managers had said as much. Rafael, not fully understanding their reasoning, had not protested the name. They, he thought, knew more about such things.

The first bull had refused to have much to do with him. It was a strange animal, seemingly ringwise, and Rafael had not known well enough how to fight it. He had thrust the sword into the animal five times before it died, without glory. It was a terrible and grotesque fight, everything went wrong, and the crowd had not liked it. They had chanted *fool, fool, fool* and had thrown half-full cups of beer at him, splattering the shimmering

new *traje de luces*, the multi-colored suit of lights, he was proudly wearing for the first time. A cushion had caught him in the head.

His second opportunity with his three bulls of the afternoon had turned out to be even worse than the first. The animal was too small for a fight in the most important ring in the whole of Mexico. The crowd knew this and was angry, strangely enough, at Rafael, as if he had had something to do with the size of the bull, but that was the way the crowds sometimes were in their unified and often misdirected passion. He killed the animal badly, as soon as permission was given from the judges high in the stands. The animal seemed to die willingly, as if thankful to be out of such a foolish and embarrassing spectacle. The crowd had hooted as before, but louder and more derisively. *Bobo . . . bobo . . . bobo*, the awful and ugly sound rang and echoed in his highly sensitive ears and clouded his vision. He wished he could shout something, anything, back at them, but he could not. He felt that he was, indeed, a fool, a silly fool, the worst kind, the kind on public display. He wished heartily then, in his public misery, that he had not been given such a name, a name that would haunt his memories the rest of his life.

Rafael wished, then, that he would be dragged dead, disgraced from the ring, like his first two bad bulls. It would be preferable to having to stand there and take the jeering taunts of the crowd, the crowd that he could not understand. He transferred his wrath by glaring with close hate at his managers behind the barrier. He hated them for giving him the name. They looked back, returning his glare.

Now, his third and final bull charged into the ring. It was not a small animal. The crowd yelled wildly, loving the big fighting bulls. Rafael stood tensed behind the barrier, studying the animal, sensing that this one would fight bravely. He glanced quickly over to his managers. Two of them watched the bull as it ran magnificently around the ring looking for something to challenge. The manager who spoke with the most authority looked at his young fighter with narrow and hostile eyes. Rafael understood. The cold gaze told him that his future would depend on this bull, on how bravely he fought it. Rafael did not want to return to the smalltown rings, to the near-disgrace of fighting small cows.

He turned his attention to the bull and made his decision. He motioned to his *banderilleros*, the men with the barbed sticks, to get out of the ring. He took his cape and trotted onto the sand. This great bull, he had decided, would be all his to fight and kill, with no help, no intrusion, from anyone else. It would have to be that highly unorthodox way now to erase the scandal of the first two disastrous fights.

He took the first charge with his back to the barrier, leaving himself no room to move back from a horn. He executed three passes on his knees, his back still to the unyielding barrier. The bull charged straight, not hooking, and Rafael escaped injury. The beautiful animal did everything he demanded from it. Rafael stopped the preliminary passes when he knew it would have been foolish to go on. He wished to live, if only to finish fighting this one bull.

The crowd, on their feet, yelled happily. In typical fashion, they had forgotten his first two bulls. The

three managers rushed over to Rafael shouting words of advice, but he did not hear them and he did not acknowledge the cheers of the crowd. As befits the artist, his total attention was on the bull, now standing majestically in the center of the ring, only a little tired.

At the signal of trumpets, the *picador*, carrying the long and pointed lance, rode his horse into the ring. Rafael gestured to the man to dismount. The *picador* did not understand, and Rafael bounded up and pulled the heavy and startled man off the horse. He grabbed the lance, offered mutely, mounted the horse, and rode off towards the bull, ignoring the frantic shouting from his managers. The crowd broke into excited murmurs; an apprentice never acted as *picador*. His managers stared in disbelief; they had never seen him ride a horse, much less wield the heavy and tricky lance.

Astride the padded and blindfolded horse, Rafael watched the bull paw the sand, getting ready to attack, and knew that what he was doing would decide his future in his profession. He had made the decision to impress the crowd by giving them the unexpected. He could not be stopped now, by the crowd or his managers.

The bull charged, and the horse took the powerful thrust and was protected from the deadly horns by the heavy padding. Rafael jabbed the lance into the shoulder of the bull to weaken the neck muscles. The bull backed off and charged again. It was wise, by strange instinct, and headed straight for the leg of the man this time and found its mark. A horn pierced the leg midway between knee and ankle, and Rafael fell off the horse. The plaza hushed.

The *banderilleros* rushed into the

ring, and Rafael was spared further goring. He made his way to the barrier, feeling pain he had never known, clenching his teeth to keep from vomiting. He took water from a manager, who smiled nervously and mumbled something. Rafael turned away to locate the bull.

A *banderillero* came up, holding a pair of three-foot long barbed sticks, the *banderillas*. "And now what, Rafael?" he asked.

In answer, he took the sticks and limped to the center of the ring. He took a stance twenty feet from the bull, raised the sticks over his head, and with a soundless, heart-born cry of "*Toro! Toro!*" advanced, still limping, to meet the charge of his adversary. In a rhythmic blend of color and motion, he placed the sticks. He got to the barrier and took another pair, offered to him without a word. He placed the sticks a second time.

He had one more pair of sticks to place. He leaned on the barrier and rested his head in his hands, not caring that all eyes were on him. His leg was numb. He felt his strength ebbing much too fast, but he could not let himself give up. The bull had to be dispatched, and he had to be the instrument of the bull's death. He thought for a moment of the death of the bull, the logical conclusion to the great act. He wondered how he could kill the bull and bring glory to the fine animal as well as to himself. He wondered what the crowd would expect him to do now. The fight was almost over, but the most important part remained, *la hora de verdad*, the moment of truth, the truthful and sublime, the perfect and mute death.

Walking to the center of the ring, he felt the nausea return and prayed that he would not be sick. He held

the final pair of sticks over his head, but then suddenly brought them down and broke them into four parts over his good leg. He grasped the shortened sticks, raised them high, and turned his back to the bull, ten feet away. The cavernous plaza was silent. He waited and when he heard the onrush of hooves, he turned at the last instant, but his leg fell out from under him, and he collapsed over a horn into intense but short pain, into welcome blackness.

On the operating table in the hot little infirmary under the stands, Rafael was jolted by pain and opened his eyes and saw a doctor and his managers surrounding him.

"A few stitches, a little rest," the doctor was saying, "and in a month he will be running. He has the luck of those who fight the bulls as well as the luck of the young."

"You are indeed lucky, Rafael," said the manager with most authority. "You will be lucky to get a fight in the villages after this bit of nonsense. Trying to do everything! Such absurdity! Now you will be called a crazy fool, not just a fool."

"He will be lucky to get a fight anywhere now," said another manager. "Possibly the circus, as a clown."

"Why did you get on the horse?" said the third manager. "You could have at least finished the fight if you had kept what senses you have about you."

Rafael stared at the ceiling, drained of feeling. He felt nothing now, not even the pain.

Outside, while a substitute fighter was trying to kill the bull Rafael had fought, the crowd took up, slowly and barely audible, and then louder, and finally deafening, a new and differ-

ent chant than earlier, a chant that was musical and exciting and loving.

Bobo Valiente! Bobo Valiente! they yelled, ignoring the feeble attempt of the man in the ring, an intruder, to kill the bull. They were calling *el bobo valiente*, the brave fool, back to receive their approval and their love. He was in their hearts, as echoed by their adoring cry, and they wanted him, under the stands, to hear them, to hear the new name they had given him for providing such a fight, such a wonderfully foolish and brave fight.

Rafael did hear them clearly, and a smile, small and strained, and as the loving chant grew louder, bright and broad, creased his tired face. He understood the thunderous cry and knew then that they liked his fight. Somehow, they had liked it. He felt that now he understood the crowds.

The managers looked at one another, then at Rafael, and understanding now, they pressed in closer to him.

"How do you feel, Rafaelito?" asked the one with authority. "Give me a sign."

Rafael held up his hand, smiled, and nodded.

"You will be fighting here in another month," went on the manager. "You will be running like a rabbit."

"The brave fool!" exclaimed another manager. "Your new name will draw huge crowds. You will get the finest bulls."

"You will get a contract for the cinema with your stylish grace and handsome face," said another manager, over the increasing noise from outside. Dozens of new fans had now gathered at the locked door of the infirmary. "Listen to them! They are wild!"

"We will arrange fights in Spain," said the second manager. "I will personally see that such a fact will be."

"What do you know of such things?" shouted the authoritative manager. "What have you done for this boy? *I have made all this possible.*"

"Well, but we agreed—"

"We agreed on nothing, absolutely nothing. You will remember that from now on." The manager with authority rested his hand on Rafael's breast.

The brave fool looked up at his managers, the sweet and strange noise of the crowd in his ears. These men were unreal to him, fighting among themselves like women. But he must try, he told himself, to understand them as he felt he understood the bulls, and now the crowds.

But I must fight for myself, he thought, restless sleep beginning to replace his soundless wonder at the turn of events in his life. *It is myself I must please. Up to now I have been*

a voiceless fool, a silly dupe of others. Now, I will fight well by pleasing myself. I have found a voice at last.

"Rafaelito," said the important manager, bending low over him, "are you well? A sign . . . please?"

Yes, Rafael nodded to him. "Yes," he said to himself. Yes, he smiled to the noise from outside, fading now but forever with him. He was accepting a new world, in this, his private moment of truth, a moment of truth and glory and noble pride made infinitely sweeter by the fact that Rafael de la Cruz, *El Bobo Valiente*, Brave Fool, had been born into a very special world.

Now, in his pure and gentle time of great triumph, in his truthful and eloquent hour of graceful victory as such things are in very special, very private worlds, he did not think it was quite so tragic or artless that he had been born without the solemn power and the simple dignity of speech.

On Dit

• Jan Michael Dyroff

They say
Proudhon walked seven leagues
each evening after dinner
when sun-flushed clouds
and steeples rattled in their throats
at swallows circling overhead.

His rough worker's boots
cut through tall field grass
leaving a broken stem trail
to mark which way
he'd been.
Stain clung green to leather uppers
and first damp forming
soaked his soles
so he left a track
even where he walked and it was paved.

The Other War

• Michael Lee, F.S.C.

War, like breathing, is so much a part of human life that no one pays any attention to it until trapped into doing so by unavoidable circumstances. Most men are content to let it exist in peace if it does not threaten, always willing to philosophize about it, though, in terms of an event which happens to someone else. It comes as a shock, then, when suddenly, for no reason at all, such a comfortable impersonal concept of war takes on personality, especially when it does so at the expense of your brother. Once this happens, your life is never the same again. The present certainly takes on new significance, while the future may do so, but it is the past which is most difficult to cope with—it comes alive and, like some Aeschylean character, demands not only recognition but re-incarnation.

The second Sunday in November of that year of war was one of those warm, paradoxical days in late autumn when it is difficult to decide whether to play baseball or go down to the field for a football scrimmage.

The trees were still leafed, though many of the brittle, multicolored things already skirted across the hard sidewalk, beginning to pile against the old English cement wall on the side patio, silently mocking the fresh odor of recently mown grass. It was a lazy Sunday afternoon, and I was sitting there on the side lawn of the College talking with Paul (that's my brother) across a weather-worn pic-

nic table. As we talked, he was cleaning the grooves in the table filled with the refuse of a summer, scraping them out with thoughtful moves of a broken stick of a long-since-consumed popsicle, all the time squinting into the sun and my face.

Mom and Dad were inside at a meeting for a bazaar of some kind—to help support me. It was one of those incongruous things in life—here I was sitting on the side lawn of a converted mansion talking with my brother, while my parents were inside haggling with other parents and friends over ways to help support me and my confreres who took the vow of poverty in the first place. The sun was getting warmer, beating down on us with a certain pressure and bathing us in a stickiness that reminded me of when Paul and I used to sleep out in the backyard and how in the morning as the sun came up and you woke slowly, you felt warm and comfortable, then, shortly, just warm, and, finally, uncomfortable—so that you got up.

We got up, awkwardly, slowly un-kinking our legs and clumsily trying to slide the heavy benches back across the spongy grass. We started to walk, but Paul stopped and said he had something to tell me in the same tone of voice Dad had used when he told us (I was seven and Paul was nine) that Mom had lost Brian in a miscarriage. We had stopped in an awkward position—my left foot was off the step to the entrance of the

patio, and Paul was standing stooped under a sickly-sweet string-branched tree of some sort. I looked at him for a moment, and then he said it, squinting, either from the sun or from the difficulty of it all—he was going to Vietnam.

I knew I must have said something like that's nice or okay or something, but all I can remember is feeling kind of numb like the time Mom said, in that little bathroom off the kitchen of the house in Pineville, "Grandma died this morning." I neither believed Paul nor was able to call him a liar. His words just didn't register. I remember asking where he'd go, and he mentioned Da Nang and it sounded so queer and I wasn't really sure whether it was two words or one. And then, suddenly, I knew my December seventh had come. War. Paul. Paul was going to war. I was scared and proud at the same moment—but mostly scared. My brother was a marine—had been one for over a year. But it still didn't seem right—I mean war. I'd never seen him in uniform, and he was standing there looking like any other college kid in his cordovan loafers and levis. He wasn't quite two years older than me, either. The only marine in him I had ever known was the letter-paper he wrote on, his scrawl patterned loosely against the blue-ink tracing of the Iwo Jima monument, or the number 2078762, or Henderson Hall, Va. He told me not to tell Mom because he had volunteered. He said he just felt he had to be there and besides they had asked for men.

Mom and Dad came out and we joked, over Pepsi and donuts, and discussed the ins and out of chance-book sales. Then they left me with my secret. I shook Paul's hand as he got into the car and knew him for the

first time. It was almost like holding a hideless baseball and being opened to the entwined strings you never realized were there. As the car drove away, I knew my life had changed. Life was different, soon to be played against the backdrop of Huntley-Brinkley and *The Inquirer* and some other things that I could feel coming—something which was to grow and deepen, threatening to tear me apart as the days he spent in the war lengthened. It was a vague feeling that Hemingway had been right. They threw you into the game without rules, and the first time you stepped off base they killed you. I went into the house to Vespers and I knew I should pray and wanted to pray. But December seventh and Da Nang and Hemingway kept coming back, and it was difficult to fight off the desire to say yes that's the way it was—Hemingway was right and not God. The struggle within was to get worse.

A few days later Mom's letter came to me at College. I really felt sorry for her. She was trying to be as gentle as possible, which seemed enough to break me because it contrasted so much with what he had to say. Her son—my brother—but *her son* was going to war. He hurt her and I knew she was fighting the tears as she wrote because there were the other kids—six of them in the house, and if she broke down they would be scared, like the time she cried when Stace, my little brother, was lost and she knew he was dead. He wasn't—was just upstairs asleep under someone's bed. But Mom was brave and came out with the whole story and how she and Dad were proud of Paul for living the life he knew he had to live. Then she talked heavily of the little things—how Eileen had bitten the dog, and that the fish were

now part of the sewer system having been flushed down the toilet by Peggy, and how a third of the police force had been to the house for breakfast (*he* was there about a complaint that the dog was relieving herself on the rhododendrons of the old biddie who lived next door). Then, weary of it all, she let the mask fall and became the mother sending her son off to war. She ended by saying twenty years ago she had seen Dad off to Europe, and now Paul was going too. She didn't know how she was going to make it again. She ended with a phrase that God had been good to us all along and He'd see this through. I felt like spitting, but I was reading the letter in an econoline station wagon going to class and was sitting in the middle. She signed the letter *Love*.

We were together one more time before Paul shipped out to Pendleton, California, the west coast's equivalent to Parris Island. Paul took us out to dinner and a movie. I watched the car come up the college driveway from my second floor bedroom window until it slowed and moved next to one of the econolines parked out front. I started to move towards the door so that they wouldn't have to come inside, but Paul got out and was in uniform. He looked great and I laughed as I thought of how many times he had called it a monkey suit and how Mom must have talked him into wearing it. I didn't move because I wanted him to come in. I wanted the other guys to see him. More for me than for them. I wanted someone else to tell me he was a marine; somehow I still didn't believe it. I turned and walked down to meet him when Tom, my roommate, came running up the stairs and said Herbie's here, and I was ready to make him a can-

didate for Easter Seals. Paul's first name was Herbert and he hated it, and I used to call him that to get him to fight. One day, when we lived in Utah, I let it out on a bus going to school. He was a freshman and I was in the seventh grade, and all the girls just loved it. When we got home, he tore me apart. I got a good swing in with the rounded end of a number 12 tennis racket, but he hit me so hard I had to chew gum to hear again.

That night was absolutely crazy. We went—Mom, Dad, Paul, and I, to some swank restaurant for dinner. As we entered, a girl checker with all the weight in the right places, flirtingly asked Paul for his hat calling him a soldier. He answered with a curt *ma'am* that's a lie and I'm a marine, and straightfaced too. Dad broke up. I was in my black suit but I came out with a horse laugh anyway, and Mom nearly disowned the three of us. We sat down and Dad ordered drinks, but Paul said he was on the wagon and would only have milk. By the end of the evening he had three rum cokes, a brandy, and a manhattan, but that's neither here nor there. By the time the meal got to the table we had finished off three baskets of rolls and were on the fourth. As we left the table, Paul wanted to sing the marine corps hymn with original verses, but we somehow made it to the movie with little difficulty, if I overlooked the fact that he told the arch sophisticated manager at the door that although the hamburgers had been good, Gino's had better french fries.

Dad wanted to see *Becket*, of all things, so we went. By the time we got to the theatre, an upper-crust deal in a big shopping center, I was beginning to experience a certain spe-

cies of pain, not from having laughed so much, but from having tried to hold it in so much. But, once we were in line, Paul started all over again by asking the usher if he wanted to trade uniforms, and, as the line became more intimate, by threatening to pretend he was claustrophobic, which would give him a reason to throw a fit. We were finally seated just as the newsreel came on. We clapped and fell silent, like the little kids in the anacin commercial. Bobby Kennedy was shaking the hands of wounded marines in a hospital somewhere near Da Nang while on a goodwill tour. I looked at Paul's face in the syncope, smoky light given off by the movie camera and his eyes were quiet, his jaw moving slowly just about where he had missed a spot while shaving. I saw Mom's hand silently touch Paul's arm, and I wanted to cry. It wasn't fair. But the report ended quickly, followed by something on pigeon racing, and the moment was a memory. Then came *Becket* and we laughed through the whole thing. T. S. Eliot would have murdered me for desecrating his cathedral had he been there. We had a line for every incident. Hoi-polloi around us kept coughing and looking, and I thought I should be more reserved being in black and all and representing the college, but Paul said not to worry because he was representing the whole marine corps. That did it. I just didn't give a damn. It just seemed great to be alive.

November 21 was a warm, ordinary day, and it just didn't seem possible that Paul was leaving on the seven-thirty jet for war. Just Mom and Dad went to the airport—Paul wanted it that way. I think now it was because Dad told me Paul had cried and said he was sorry he had

to tell him, but he had a crazy feeling he wasn't coming back. He didn't tell Mom—just Dad, and Dad was to carry that burden a long time. All I have of the day is a blurred picture of a jet spanning an early morning sky and the realization that it was a hell of a day. There was nothing I nor anyone could do. It was like the time when I was ten and we were packed and ready to leave Pineville for Utah. The morning was exactly the same—just a little stickier because it was late August—and I can remember watching the big yellow and green moving truck with the three-masted schooner on the side pull out onto Route 413 West and there was nothing I could do about it. But it hurt to think of not being able to do anything about Paul's going, so I went to class and came home and played ball losing myself in the game with the feel of the nylon and the rhythm of the dribble and the smell of burgeoning sweat all united with the exhilarating feeling of knowing your body is responding smoothly and you are in control. Then, at a time-out one of the brothers asked if Paul had left yet, and I felt like punching him. Instead, I said yes he was off and the other brother said that's tough and I thought of Simon and Garfunkle's *Dangling Conversation*. I spent the rest of the day thinking he was gone. Three simple words, and there was nothing I nor anyone else could do about it. I felt tense and my insides felt like the rigging of a ship in one of those Captain Bligh movies just before it snaps.

He landed out there ten days before Christmas. It wasn't even in the paper, not that I had expected it, though I knew my phantasy was that it would be like the pictures of D-Day

that Paul and I used to watch on Cronkite's 20th Century. Instead, there was just a note from Paul, refracted through the prism of Mom's handwriting—something like "no time to write." Combat. And not to worry because he'd keep his head down. The paper said the name of the operation was Harvest Moon. I worried and prayed to God not to let my brother be harvested.

It felt odd going home for Christmas that year. The brothers who lived in the area were permitted to go home for the day, and so I went, but still I felt awkward. Everyone else was excited, eager to spend the day with their families, but I was afraid of what the day might hold. Midnight Mass had been comforting up until the homily. The priest talked on how Christ had brought peace to the world, and it was all I could do to sit there and then, at the end, he said the Mass was being offered for a Corporal H. P. Lee, U.S.M.C. I almost walked out. Peace and war. Christ. I got through Mass all right, though, and the egg-nog and donuts afterwards, but I couldn't sleep. It hit me that this was the first Christmas Paul would be away from home. I, though younger, had been the first to spend the day away. I was fourteen and lying there, I remembered how odd and lonely that first time was. I had left my home of four years in Bountiful, Utah for Napa, California and preparatory school. I left in September, knowing in advance that my family would be moving back to Pennsylvania in October. But I wanted it, and they were proud to know I was living my life the way I knew it had to be lived. But that first Christmas was hell, and I wasn't even at war. It was too expensive to come all the way back to Pennsyl-

vania for the vacation, so I went to a friend's house. He was a Mexican and lived in the ghetto near Candlestick Park, and I never felt so alone in my life. His parents couldn't speak English, nor I Spanish. I just lay there, and it all came back and I couldn't do anything about it. I cried and punched the pillow and called myself an ass because eighteen-year-old kids didn't cry, but it still came back and I still cried. I finally got to sleep I guess, because I remember waking up on Christmas morning with a headache and a stuffed nose.

When I got home, all the kids were at the door smiling and talking all at once. The two little ones were still in their doctor dentins and smelled of the Christmas tree when I held their warm bodies against my December face. It looked like every other Christmas and I was really happy. Everyone was excited, and Mom and Dad looked proud. It all seemed so great. Then the radio came on with the news of a broken truce and it was all over. Mom stopped smiling and Dad just listened. The kids were quiet. Then a dizzy commercial came on and Dad asked me if I wanted a beer and the game began—the game the whole family could play as a sequel to monopoly. The object of the game was to pretend Paul was home and the day was like it always had been. But Stace made a wrong move. He excitedly called from one side of the room, hey Paul look at my new train and everyone caught it. I wasn't Paul. God, how I wished I was. Then Stace put words to the question everyone had been asking through coughs and anxious glances and gentle movements, "Mom, when's Paul coming home?" Mom started a little and then cheerfully said not this Christmas but next Christmas and we'd all be to-

gether again. I remembered the day I had come back from the months in California, a year older and six inches taller and how the dog I bought barked at me and how Mom held me until I thought she'd never let go and how all the kids looked so different, and I knew Paul would have this too. But I also remembered we were all together then, too. For two years. And now Paul was gone. But I didn't say anything.

We spent the afternoon paging through the photo albums and everyone gathered around in the living room with their new things. We did it every Christmas. Everyone laughed at Mom and Dad's baby pictures and at mine. I always seemed to be with Paul, framed against the red-brick background of North Philly. There was a picture of the big Irish setter that once chewed Paul's wooden airplane and which bit me after I pulled it across the kitchen floor by its tail. The pictures were in chronological order, and in ten minutes we were through Philadelphia and into New Jersey and the pre-fabricated house in the development near the quarry where Tommy Harris split Paul's head open with a brick because he had stolen his Dick Tracy comic book. Easton was next and wasn't much, judging from the pictures. Mom laughed at the one of me sitting on the peeling-gray back porch with a broken arm, and I remembered how mad I'd been because she wouldn't let me go swimming. The only other picture was of Paul and me standing outside a vine-covered Methodist church in YMCA T-shirts the day we moved to Pineville, a small farm town in Pennsylvania. And then the picture was there. I don't know why, but I always felt excited when I saw it and did that

day. I was about eight and Paul was almost ten and we had gotten our first real army outfits for Christmas. We had real helmets and canteen belts and were standing there behind the H-O gauge platform. My helmet was over my eyes and Paul had a crazy smile, as though he knew something I didn't.

The album went on through Pineville into Utah and back again before it was time to leave. Mom and Dad walked me to the car and I almost couldn't leave. A light snow was falling and tree lights dappled the front lawn. It was the first quiet moment of the day, and each of us seemed to realize how difficult it had been. Mom just sighed and hoped he was okay. Dad didn't say much except for me to be careful driving home and that Paul would be okay—probably watching Bob Hope or something. I waved as I pulled away, and the kids waved back from the window and Mom and Dad waved from the porch.

Paul didn't get to see Bob Hope that year. He was on guard duty on Christmas Eve at Da Nang, and a terrorist threw a bomb into a "friendly's" house, and Paul ran down and into a mother who was coming out of a hut all bloody, carrying a baby and she gave it to Paul. He said in the letter she died while he was holding the kid, and it just screamed and he told me it was horrible to hear a kid scream like that. He said he just kept thinking of Stace and how he couldn't do anything with the baby but hold it until the doc came and took it back to Da Nang. He was madder than hell because the truce was on, and they couldn't go after the V.C. I was reading the letter in the library at college and remembered the time in Easton

when I had forgotten my lunch and had only noticed it when we were over half the distance to school and how I cried and wouldn't go any farther without it and how Paul was madder than hell but took me home anyway. We were both late that day and had to spend an hour in the principal's cold leathery office. The room looked out onto the hill where, just a few days later, Paul's friend Jim Woods was killed by a car. When I think of that day, I always think of crushed flesh because Paul said that's what had happened. I prayed that afternoon that Paul would be able to take it and make it home, and I felt that suffering wasn't like childbirth at all but like having to hold a kid and listen to him scream and not be able to do anything about it except to hold him. Suffering was like that. The only way you could answer it was to hold it. I wrote Paul *that* in answer to his letter, and he wrote back and asked but why kids, and I felt like punching walls.

Christmas vacation faded into semester exams, and it was a difficult thing to keep interested in study. But I did okay until the English exam. I was confident going into it because I had prepared ahead of time, having chosen to analyze a short story. When the professor handed out the exam sheet, however, there were four other choices and I read them partly to loosen up and partly out of curiosity. The third question was a quote from a person advocating withdrawal from Vietnam and the assignment was to discuss the quote. I put the sheet down and started to write my analysis of the story but I couldn't. My mind went blank. Nothing came. Nothing except that damn quote. I reread it and decided to defend the world from communism. It had to be

right. Besides my brother was in it. Suddenly I stopped writing, and I thought that statistics is all that war is and that the Pentagon didn't have a brother, so how could it really give a damn. I pressed the pen into the desk top. I couldn't write. I talked to myself to keep from panicking but I did anyway. I would flunk the exam. I tried to write and wanted to cry. Then, on the back of the desk in front of me I saw the collegiate obscenity. I was insulted. Obscenity me? Obscenity you. And I got up and walked out madder than hell. I had only been there for twenty minutes and everyone looked, and I felt like saying obscenity you to them, but I just walked out and went back to the house. It was just too easy to talk about war without talking about people. When I got home I was scared and called the professor, and he let me bring the exam in that night. I wrote on air pollution and pulled a good mark out of the course.

I registered for the second semester and managed to switch into a different English comp section. I began to get lost in school work, hiding the fear that I wouldn't be able to do it under great activity. I was only into the second semester a few weeks when one evening, as we were walking into chapel for Compline, the director asked to see me. He took me to the guest parlor and shut the door, and I knew. He said he had bad news and I knew Paul was dead. His lips quivered a bit as he told me Dad had called and said Paul had been wounded. I asked where and he said I better call home.

Dad answered and sounded officially calm over the phone. Two marines had been to the house and given all the details. Paul was wounded in the head during a night patrol and

was in a Da Nang hospital, but he was okay and expected to recover in a week. I talked to Mom and tried to be cheerful, but she just kept saying, "Oh, God." That was all she said that summer in Pineville when I came home with my head bandaged after one of our farm fights. I had fallen off a barn roof and banged my head against an old tractor. I couldn't comfort her then either. Dad got back on, and we talked for a while and I asked if I should come home and he said no because Mom might think it's worse that it really was.

Paul's letter arrived two days later and he explained everything. He joked all the way through and told Mom he tried to keep his head down but it was just too big and that he would try harder next time. He ended by asking for a Mass to be said for a Dan, his buddy, who had been killed on the same night. I saw the name in print again when Paul wrote me and told me something I will never forget. He said that night was the first time he knew he had killed anybody. All the other times, when they found a body, he pretended someone else had done it. But that night they were ambushed and he had stabbed two V. C. with a bayonet and had felt the blood and said he couldn't sleep afterwards. He had never killed anyone before and he asked me what did I think. He had always been taught that killing was wrong and now he had done it and no one said anything. I wrote back and tried to tell him not to let it disturb him because I thought it fitted into a plan.

Paul got over it somehow, and so did I. The days after February were cold in the States and the snow came blanketing everything, making it seem absurd receiving the air mail

envelope stamped free and to hear of 120 degree heat and stifling rain just after coming in from shoveling snow. The winter months went quickly and merged into a tired Spring, so much so that the events of those days have run together in my mind and I just remember periscopes. By May I was tired of war and tried to escape from it. I stopped reading the paper on a regular basis and just opened it each morning to the second page to make sure the picture of the marine in dress blues killed by hostile forces didn't correspond to the one I carried in my wallet. I escaped into study, patterning my life around economics and *Hedda Gabler*, hating the rote memory work of biology and becoming lost in *Death of a Salesman*. It seemed to me that war was just that—economics and drama and life and death—all thrown together and impossible to unravel, all the time never knowing for certain whether the next phone call would bring the word that Corporal H. P. Lee had been zapped in action. Never knowing for sure who brought over those long, plain aluminum boxes, or who took the pictures of the flag-draped coffin and the color guard for *Life* magazine. Those months came back now as a long frenzied effort to escape the war, all the time knowing it was there, and Paul was there and might come home in a box. The effort was differentiated only by the irregular appearance of air mail envelopes that used to stick out of the boxes at the top of the stairs. I could look from the bottom of the steps and see it, and I would run up and never open it in the hallway but carry it to my room and then open it, never believing he was still alive until I saw his loose scrawl, and then I'd laugh even if nothing in the letter was fun-

ny. They were always dated five days back and I liked to think back and see what I had been doing and try to catch the moment until it began to hurt too much, because I would remember it had been five days before and I might be reading his last letter. Once, while reading his letter, the phone rang and I thought the rigging had finally snapped and I walked like a dead man to the phone and almost cried when it was the salesgirl from the Coke Company asking if we wanted ten cases or twelve cases this week.

Spring didn't come until summer that year. It wasn't until July that I began to feel some of the hope that usually comes in Spring. But with July came Operation Hastings, and once again winter came back and I knew he wasn't going to make it. The papers described Hastings as a search-and-destroy mission gone wild, for the marines had run into a whole division of North Vietnamese on the DMZ. They said the fighting was bitter, and Paul said it was hell. Then, on a late August morning *The Inquirer* came, and I looked at the headlines and felt numb. India company had been ambushed and rendered ineffective as a fighting unit. That was Paul. Ineffective. They meant dead or crippled or maimed. Ineffective. Life was ineffective. But Paul wrote and said he was okay, one of the few to survive, and it was only later that our family learned he had been wounded a second time.

The fall semester began again, and the days found their way into autumn accompanied by the sound of rustling leaves. The days were tinted with the smell of autumn, and I remembered how Mom used to have homemade vegetable soup for us when we got

off the bus in Pineville after an hour's ride. Those were the nights when the big log fire burned in the living room and all of us gathered around it, each pretending to be occupied, Dad with paper work, Mom with sewing, and the kids with school work—all afraid to admit we were really there just to be together. God, how I wanted those days back but, like Paul, they were gone.

December came with the word that Paul wouldn't be home for Christmas. He had been extended and was madder than hell. They hadn't given him a new date. I decided to go home for a visit on the tenth, the day he was originally supposed to leave for the States. Mom picked me up and we talked about how it wouldn't be long now, and how she wouldn't take the tree down till he came home and God it would be great to have everyone home again. As we pulled into the driveway, Tim came running out and said something's wrong. The next thing I remember is seeing Dad hunched over the radio on the formica table top. Mom yelled from the door, "Herb, what is it?" Dad turned around and I knew. He was ashen and just said they dropped a bomb accidentally on some marines. Mom screamed, Herb I know it, and began to cry uncontrollably. He held her and I knew then that that was all you could do with suffering. The bomb had been dropped on razorback ridge on a company of 3-3-3rd marines and that was Paul. That day was a nightmare. Dad plotted the area on a map from the radio account and Paul's last letter and called the news station every ten minutes for six hours. Every time the news came on, the house was silent until it was over. Mom cried all day. I took the kids out to play ball and came back expecting

the news. There wasn't any, and Dad said it would take at least a day for notification, and if it didn't come in a day, that would mean he was okay. I went home around ten and waited up until three. No word. The news came three days later. Paul was fine and due home in January.

Christmas came in January that year. The tree was up for December twenty-fifth and the kids got presents and I went to Midnight Mass, but Christmas didn't come until the thirteenth of January. It was a Saturday and I had been sleeping, and around

two-thirty in the afternoon my roommate woke me and said Mom was on the phone and my brother was in California. I ran to the phone and Mom cried and said she had just talked to him and he had cried and said he couldn't believe he was home. He was coming in on the twenty-first at four-thirty in the afternoon. Mom and I talked for an hour, and as I put the phone down, I suddenly felt exhausted. The war was over. Paul was coming home. He had come back, and somehow I knew I was back too. Not that I had been anywhere.

Too Late to Bow

• Judy Dunn

Each broken corpse looked the same
Lying warm at Gettysburg and Shiloh,
Too late to bow to bastard fame.

No one quite remembered what became
Of Sara Anne's engraved memento—
Each broken corpse looked the same:

Hunters, Bradleys, Websters, and McClains,
Pickets lying faceless in their rows,
Too late to bow to bastard fame.

Each foul ditch held all the shame
That brothers lying within could know;
Each broken corpse looked the same—

None remembered Lee's immortal name,
If he were blue or gray or black as crow,
Too late to bow to bastard fame,

But better sleep than limbless, maybe lame
Reality of shoulders cracked and low.
Each broken corpse looked the same,
Too late to bow to bastard fame.

Chekhov in Erin: Sean O'Faolain's Career As Short Story Writer

• Paul A. Doyle

In the last thirty years the most accomplished Irish literature has been produced in the genre of the short story; and Liam O'Flaherty, Sean O'Faolain, Frank O'Connor, Bryan MacMahon, and Mary Lavin, in particular, have contributed to a growing conviction that the Irish have a special genius as practitioners of the brief narrative. Although this viewpoint has been developing, literary critics have preferred to concentrate on the novel and the drama and on the older Irish writers — especially Yeats, Synge, Joyce, and O'Casey — and have, consequently, neglected to analyze the writings of the more recent masters of the Irish short story.

The greatest living Irish writer — he has been acknowledged by his fellow authors as the “Dean of Irish Letters” and “the keeper of the Irish intellectual conscience” — is Sean O'Faolain. Novelist, literary critic, biographer, historian, Gaelic translator, and editor, O'Faolain has assayed every literary form. By his own admission and by the consensus of the relatively few men of letters who have examined segments of his work, his most significant writing and his claim to permanent fame rests with his short stories. With this background in mind, a ground-breaking study of O'Faolain's overall career as a short story writer is very desirable and very much in order.

Midsummer Night Madness and Other Stories (1932), Sean O'Faolain's first collection of short fiction, focuses on the time of the “Troubles” and treats both the IRA struggle against the British and the ensuing Civil War between the Republicans and the Free State forces. This volume's themes are many: the disorganization and irresponsibility of the rebel group; its often erratic and immature leadership; the terror foisted on the country by the Black and Tans; the extreme poverty of the ordinary people contrasted with the elegance of the aristocratic country houses (some of which have fallen into decay); and the general chaos and confusion of a time of dissension and warfare. It is noticeable that O'Faolain, even with his IRA and Republican background, does not choose sides; the faults and blunders of all groups are examined and recorded.

O'Faolain's first book is saturated in the atmosphere of the period, and the narratives involve participants speaking from first-hand experience. “The Bombshop” is typical. In this tale, three IRA men make bombs in a building in Cork city. Mother Dale, an amiable, elderly woman who keeps a clothes shop on the first floor of the building, is accidentally shot and killed by one

would force the sensibility to dominate the intelligence. Thus O'Faolain, to borrow Yeats's epitaph, casts his "cold eye on life, on death."

O'Faolain himself wonders whether he is fundamentally a realist or a romantic. Ostensibly he is a realist; yet his subject matter must of necessity—given the Irish people and scene—have some romantic overtones. But O'Faolain's perplexity over realism and romanticism in his own case appears to be idle speculation. Essentially he is a realist—in his objectivity, in his conscious intellectual handling of material, in his use of irony, in his firm and hard grasp of truth, in his portrayal of life in its bleakest actuality. Nevertheless, his work contains lyrical and atmospheric qualities that are usually labeled romantic. Like Chekhov, O'Faolain is a realist who can blend truth with mood and poetry so that his portrayal of existence is enhanced by nuances and subtleties which give a deeper meaning to the writing and a closer look at life's contradictions, deceptions, and mysteries. Overall, O'Faolain is more poetic and more contemplative than Chekhov but less ironic and a bit less detached.

Like Chekhov, O'Faolain is basically an optimist. Despite man's follies and foolishness, O'Faolain still admires humanity; he affirms man, although he stresses that men and men's problems are continually perplexing, that sadness and tragedy are pervasive, that love is transient, and that existence is an enigma which, nevertheless, must be continually dissected. One seeks answers even where there are no answers; and, above all, the writer should use all his intelligence and sensibility to ponder "the inscrutable mystery of human suffering."

Two Poems

• Paul Kelly

From Red to Red

from red to red
in this small crawling
tunnel, from
that impossible, harshly glittering bulb
to that improbable plastic glow . . .
a long fall
and somewhere in the middle of things,
we

Bitter Poem (Almost)

What? No twilight?
No faintly ebbing day?
No mask descending slowly
O'er the earth? Why . . .
Why, I protest! I demand
That . . . that . . . that . . .
No twilight?

And Pride and Stubbornness Remain

• Elizabeth Shafer

I was playing a solitary game of mumbletypeg in Grandmother's front yard that Saturday when the postman came.

"Hello, Bud. Here's a letter for your grandfather," he said, handing it to me. It was a thin brown envelope with "Morton's Lumber Company" in the upper lefthand corner.

When I took it into the house, it sent Mom and Grandmother into a flurry of speculation. Why should the lumber company, where Grandfather worked every day, Monday through Friday, and half-days on Saturday, have to send him a letter? Couldn't they just speak to him, or have him stop by the office on his way home from the yard? At last Grandmother propped the letter against the cranberry glass sugar bowl at Grandfather's plate, and she and Mom resigned themselves to wait.

I lingered, listening to their voices, absently fingering the treasures in the old walnut bookcase: the gold ore samples of an optimistic uncle, the pomegranate preserved to the point of petrification, the stereopticon which usually delighted me. None of these held my attention now, for something of my mother's and grandmother's anxiety had communicated itself to me, and I found myself tense with waiting.

So many things seemed threatening to an eleven-year-old boy in that year of mid-Depression. The worried whis-

pers of my elders . . . talk of jobs lost, something mysterious and disgraceful called Relief, the constant struggle to "make ends meet." Three months before, the house where my father and mother and I were living had been sold out from under us. We couldn't find another house we could afford and so, with considerable reluctance, we had moved into Grandfather's cottage. We paid rent—my folks insisted on that—but the situation was tense and unhappy. Dad and Grandfather had never hit it off too well as long as I could remember, and it was Grandfather's often-expressed opinion that any man worth his salt could hang onto a steady job even with work as scarce as it was now.

Dad, who had been forced to scramble for one job after another the last two years, was infuriated by this. "He struts around that lumberyard like he owns it," he told Mom once.

Crouched over my homework, listening, I had a vivid picture of Grandfather as he looked when we made a rare visit to Morton's. He seemed to stand straighter, taller, to have more authority, more reality somehow in the dark, wood-scented caverns of The Yard.

"I guess he does, a little," Mom agreed, "but think how long he's worked there."

"We can't all be perfect," Dad said bitterly.

Grandfather always came home at

noon to a hot lunch. For years he'd ridden a bicycle, but he didn't like to compete with all those cars on the avenue any more, so now he rode the bus. On Saturdays, he walked the fourteen blocks home to save the ten-cent bus fare. It was nearly twelve-thirty when we heard him slam the back screen door.

We waited, listening, knowing the elaborate ritual which had become habit over the years. Today, in our impatience, the ritual seemed endless. Hanging his black felt hat and blue-and-white pin-stripe cotton jacket on a hook outside the kitchen door. Washing his hands at the sink with Skat from the yellow can. Wiping them with great thoroughness on the red-bordered huck towel Grandmother had put out for him. Dashing cold water on his face and patting it dry. Turning to the little brass-bordered mirror by the window to comb his dark gray hair into the same elaborately parted style he had worn for forty years. Only then—after a final touch to his large moustache—did he come into the diningroom, carrying himself with the indolent stoop of a born aristocrat, an air belied by his work-strained hands.

He nodded at us and seated himself at the table. Grandmother poured his tea, and we waited.

"There's a letter for you," I blurted, unable to bear the suspense a moment longer.

"Bud!" Mom threw me a warning glance. Grandfather believed that children should be seen and not heard.

"From Morton's," Grandmother said. She exchanged a meaningful look with Mom. "Aren't you going to open it?"

Grandfather unfolded his white linen napkin and tucked it under his

chin. He spooned sugar into his tea, added a dollop of milk, and stirred it slowly.

"I saw Mr. Morton this morning," he said. "I wonder why he would write me a letter."

"That's what we were wondering," Grandmother said with heavy patience.

Grandfather took his penknife from his pocket, opened it, and carefully slit the envelope at one end. He pulled out the single sheet and unfolded it. Holding it at arm's length (at sixty-five, he had never owned a pair of glasses), he read the letter.

Rigid with curiosity, we waited. Watching him, I thought that with his large Roman nose and dark, slightly protuberant eyes, Grandfather looked a little like a hawk. Or, more accurately, perhaps, a falcon, long tamed and quiet on the wrist. Not that I can ever remember any evidence of hawkishness, only the quick, occasional malice of a caged bird.

It seemed to take him a long time to read the letter, although we could all see that it was very short—two or three paragraphs on letterhead stationery. Grandfather was always immaculately barbered, and his skin, smooth over the high cheekbones and lean jaws, was as clear and rosy as a child's. Now, as we watched, his face flushed deeply, then went very white. Slowly, without a word, he put the letter down on the table.

"What does it say?" Mom asked.

Grandfather did not answer her. He did not look at any of us, but took a great gulp of the steaming hot tea.

Grandmother picked up the letter, handed it to Mom. "Read it."

Mom glanced at Grandfather, who paid no attention, and read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Baxter: Under new company policy, all employees who have reached sixty-five years of age are to be retired with a pension. Since your sixty-fifth birthday occurred some months ago, your retirement will go into effect immediately. In appreciation of your thirty years of service with the firm, a monthly pension of \$22.50 will be mailed to you on the first of each month. Very truly yours, Matthew Morton, President, Morton Lumber Company."

"Retired!" Grandmother gasped.

"Just like that," Mom said indignantly, tossing the letter onto the table.

"On a pension . . ." Grandmother murmured.

"Twenty-two dollars and fifty cents each and every month. After thirty years. How generous!" Mom's eyes welled with sudden tears, and she turned angrily to Grandfather.

But Grandfather said nothing. He continued to down great swallows of the hot green tea. At last he wiped his moustache, shoved back his chair, and went into the backyard, still without a word.

Mom and Grandmother continued to exclaim indignantly. I sensed that what had happened was very important and had been a great shock to them, but there had been many shocks in my world of late, and my attention soon wandered. In a little while I slipped away to the living-room, where I settled down to leafing through Grandmother's old copies of *Hearst's International*. Most Saturdays, I would have gone into the backyard to play, but the thought of Grandfather out there, silent and brooding, prevented that. As for the cottage behind Grandmother's house where Mom and Dad and I were liv-

ing, I hated it and avoided it as much as possible.

It was evening before Dad came home from work. Mom told him about the letter as soon as he came in the door. Dad put down his black tin lunch bucket and took off his hat.

"That's rough. That's rough on a man. He has a lot of good years ahead of him still."

"Nobody will hire a man his age these days," Mom said. "They've never been able to save a penny on his salary. Ray, how are they going to live?"

"Like the rest of us, I guess," Dad said. "Day by day, hand to mouth." At the look on Mom's face, he softened. "It'll work out, Ellen. Somehow."

In the days that followed, Grandfather hung about the place like a restless ghost. He and Grandmother got up and ate breakfast at the same hour as when he had worked, and he continued to dress carefully in the same neat pin-stripe overalls and pale blue shirt. But after breakfast there was no longer any place to go, as there had been every day for thirty years, nothing to do, as there had been ever since he could remember.

Before they had come West for Grandmother's health, Grandfather had been a farmer in the loam-rich lake country of northern Iowa. He had married Grandmother, a young widow with two children, whose railroad engineer husband had been killed in an accident. Those two children—my mother and her sister—resented their new father, both for replacing their own father and for spending the inheritance that was to have sent them to college. This hostility, coupled with Grandmother's colorful reminiscences of her first husband in Grand-

would force the sensibility to dominate the intelligence. Thus O'Faolain, to borrow Yeats's epitaph, casts his "cold eye on life, on death."

O'Faolain himself wonders whether he is fundamentally a realist or a romantic. Ostensibly he is a realist; yet his subject matter must of necessity—given the Irish people and scene—have some romantic overtones. But O'Faolain's perplexity over realism and romanticism in his own case appears to be idle speculation. Essentially he is a realist—in his objectivity, in his conscious intellectual handling of material, in his use of irony, in his firm and hard grasp of truth, in his portrayal of life in its bleakest actuality. Nevertheless, his work contains lyrical and atmospheric qualities that are usually labeled romantic. Like Chekhov, O'Faolain is a realist who can blend truth with mood and poetry so that his portrayal of existence is enhanced by nuances and subtleties which give a deeper meaning to the writing and a closer look at life's contradictions, deceptions, and mysteries. Overall, O'Faolain is more poetic and more contemplative than Chekhov but less ironic and a bit less detached.

Like Chekhov, O'Faolain is basically an optimist. Despite man's follies and foolishness, O'Faolain still admires humanity; he affirms man, although he stresses that men and men's problems are continually perplexing, that sadness and tragedy are pervasive, that love is transient, and that existence is an enigma which, nevertheless, must be continually dissected. One seeks answers even where there are no answers; and, above all, the writer should use all his intelligence and sensibility to ponder "the inscrutable mystery of human suffering."

Two Poems

• Paul Kelly

From Red to Red

from red to red
in this small crawling
tunnel, from
that impossible, harshly glittering bulb
to that improbable plastic glow . . .
a long fall
and somewhere in the middle of things,
we

Bitter Poem (Almost)

What? No twilight?
No faintly ebbing day?
No mask descending slowly
O'er the earth? Why . . .
Why, I protest! I demand
That . . . that . . . that . . .
No twilight?

And Pride and Stubbornness Remain

• Elizabeth Shafer

I was playing a solitary game of mumbletypeg in Grandmother's front yard that Saturday when the postman came.

"Hello, Bud. Here's a letter for your grandfather," he said, handing it to me. It was a thin brown envelope with "Morton's Lumber Company" in the upper lefthand corner.

When I took it into the house, it sent Mom and Grandmother into a flurry of speculation. Why should the lumber company, where Grandfather worked every day, Monday through Friday, and half-days on Saturday, have to send him a letter? Couldn't they just speak to him, or have him stop by the office on his way home from the yard? At last Grandmother propped the letter against the cranberry glass sugar bowl at Grandfather's plate, and she and Mom resigned themselves to wait.

I lingered, listening to their voices, absently fingering the treasures in the old walnut bookcase: the gold ore samples of an optimistic uncle, the pomegranate preserved to the point of petrification, the stereopticon which usually delighted me. None of these held my attention now, for something of my mother's and grandmother's anxiety had communicated itself to me, and I found myself tense with waiting.

So many things seemed threatening to an eleven-year-old boy in that year of mid-Depression. The worried whis-

pers of my elders . . . talk of jobs lost, something mysterious and disgraceful called Relief, the constant struggle to "make ends meet." Three months before, the house where my father and mother and I were living had been sold out from under us. We couldn't find another house we could afford and so, with considerable reluctance, we had moved into Grandfather's cottage. We paid rent—my folks insisted on that—but the situation was tense and unhappy. Dad and Grandfather had never hit it off too well as long as I could remember, and it was Grandfather's often-expressed opinion that any man worth his salt could hang onto a steady job even with work as scarce as it was now.

Dad, who had been forced to scabble for one job after another the last two years, was infuriated by this. "He struts around that lumberyard like he owns it," he told Mom once.

Crouched over my homework, listening, I had a vivid picture of Grandfather as he looked when we made a rare visit to Morton's. He seemed to stand straighter, taller, to have more authority, more reality somehow in the dark, wood-scented caverns of The Yard.

"I guess he does, a little," Mom agreed, "but think how long he's worked there."

"We can't all be perfect," Dad said bitterly.

Grandfather always came home at

noon to a hot lunch. For years he'd ridden a bicycle, but he didn't like to compete with all those cars on the avenue any more, so now he rode the bus. On Saturdays, he walked the fourteen blocks home to save the ten-cent bus fare. It was nearly twelve-thirty when we heard him slam the back screen door.

We waited, listening, knowing the elaborate ritual which had become habit over the years. Today, in our impatience, the ritual seemed endless. Hanging his black felt hat and blue-and-white pin-stripe cotton jacket on a hook outside the kitchen door. Washing his hands at the sink with Skat from the yellow can. Wiping them with great thoroughness on the red-bordered huck towel Grandmother had put out for him. Dashing cold water on his face and patting it dry. Turning to the little brass-bordered mirror by the window to comb his dark gray hair into the same elaborately parted style he had worn for forty years. Only then—after a final touch to his large moustache—did he come into the diningroom, carrying himself with the indolent stoop of a born aristocrat, an air belied by his work-strained hands.

He nodded at us and seated himself at the table. Grandmother poured his tea, and we waited.

"There's a letter for you," I blurted, unable to bear the suspense a moment longer.

"Bud!" Mom threw me a warning glance. Grandfather believed that children should be seen and not heard.

"From Morton's," Grandmother said. She exchanged a meaningful look with Mom. "Aren't you going to open it?"

Grandfather unfolded his white linen napkin and tucked it under his

chin. He spooned sugar into his tea, added a dollop of milk, and stirred it slowly.

"I saw Mr. Morton this morning," he said. "I wonder why he would write me a letter."

"That's what we were wondering," Grandmother said with heavy patience.

Grandfather took his penknife from his pocket, opened it, and carefully slit the envelope at one end. He pulled out the single sheet and unfolded it. Holding it at arm's length (at sixty-five, he had never owned a pair of glasses), he read the letter.

Rigid with curiosity, we waited. Watching him, I thought that with his large Roman nose and dark, slightly protuberant eyes, Grandfather looked a little like a hawk. Or, more accurately, perhaps, a falcon, long tamed and quiet on the wrist. Not that I can ever remember any evidence of hawkishness, only the quick, occasional malice of a caged bird.

It seemed to take him a long time to read the letter, although we could all see that it was very short—two or three paragraphs on letterhead stationery. Grandfather was always immaculately barbered, and his skin, smooth over the high cheekbones and lean jaws, was as clear and rosy as a child's. Now, as we watched, his face flushed deeply, then went very white. Slowly, without a word, he put the letter down on the table.

"What does it say?" Mom asked.

Grandfather did not answer her. He did not look at any of us, but took a great gulp of the steaming hot tea.

Grandmother picked up the letter, handed it to Mom. "Read it."

Mom glanced at Grandfather, who paid no attention, and read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Baxter: Under new company policy, all employees who have reached sixty-five years of age are to be retired with a pension. Since your sixty-fifth birthday occurred some months ago, your retirement will go into effect immediately. In appreciation of your thirty years of service with the firm, a monthly pension of \$22.50 will be mailed to you on the first of each month. Very truly yours, Matthew Morton, President, Morton Lumber Company."

"Retired!" Grandmother gasped.

"Just like that," Mom said indignantly, tossing the letter onto the table.

"On a pension . . ." Grandmother murmured.

"Twenty-two dollars and fifty cents each and every month. After thirty years. How generous!" Mom's eyes welled with sudden tears, and she turned angrily to Grandfather.

But Grandfather said nothing. He continued to down great swallows of the hot green tea. At last he wiped his moustache, shoved back his chair, and went into the backyard, still without a word.

Mom and Grandmother continued to exclaim indignantly. I sensed that what had happened was very important and had been a great shock to them, but there had been many shocks in my world of late, and my attention soon wandered. In a little while I slipped away to the living-room, where I settled down to leafing through Grandmother's old copies of *Hearst's International*. Most Saturdays, I would have gone into the backyard to play, but the thought of Grandfather out there, silent and brooding, prevented that. As for the cottage behind Grandmother's house where Mom and Dad and I were liv-

ing, I hated it and avoided it as much as possible.

It was evening before Dad came home from work. Mom told him about the letter as soon as he came in the door. Dad put down his black tin lunch bucket and took off his hat.

"That's rough. That's rough on a man. He has a lot of good years ahead of him still."

"Nobody will hire a man his age these days," Mom said. "They've never been able to save a penny on his salary. Ray, how are they going to live?"

"Like the rest of us, I guess," Dad said. "Day by day, hand to mouth." At the look on Mom's face, he softened. "It'll work out, Ellen. Somehow."

In the days that followed, Grandfather hung about the place like a restless ghost. He and Grandmother got up and ate breakfast at the same hour as when he had worked, and he continued to dress carefully in the same neat pin-stripe overalls and pale blue shirt. But after breakfast there was no longer any place to go, as there had been every day for thirty years, nothing to do, as there had been ever since he could remember.

Before they had come West for Grandmother's health, Grandfather had been a farmer in the loam-rich lake country of northern Iowa. He had married Grandmother, a young widow with two children, whose railroad engineer husband had been killed in an accident. Those two children—my mother and her sister—resented their new father, both for replacing their own father and for spending the inheritance that was to have sent them to college. This hostility, coupled with Grandmother's colorful reminiscences of her first husband in Grand-

father's presence, must, I can see now, have been difficult to bear. But it had not been like that the first few years.

Laurie Baxter had cut quite a dash in the country, with his cattle and hogs, his trips to St. Louis and Chicago, his planting of the first field of flax in that northern climate. He was a member of the schoolboard (always choosing the prettiest among the applicants for teacher, my mother would add, out of Grandmother's hearing), a power in the little community of Scotch, English, and Norwegian settlers.

There was another part to the story—a part which Grandmother spoke of only when Grandfather had gone out and when she herself was in one of those moods of black depression which sometimes overtook her. This part had to do with the treachery of Laurie's uncle, the foreclosure of a mortgage which forced them to sell everything at auction and leave the farm. It was this humiliation, coupled with her doctor's warning that Grandmother must seek drier air for her lungs, that sent the family westward to Colorado.

Grandfather had been forced to take any work he could get to support his growing family (three more children had been born during the years on the farm, the youngest dying of diphtheria that last, awful year)—day labor, driving a "tourist carriage," and, finally, the job at the lumberyard which was to become his life. Until now.

Now he wandered about the yard, looking at all the things the man of the house tells his wife he will fix "one of these days," a day which both know is so remote that it does not really exist for either of them. He studied the sagging garage roof. The

broken pickets on the fence. The loose screen door on the back porch. He did pound a couple of the square, unpainted pickets into place and tighten the spring on the door. But mostly he stood about the yard, surveying the bright yellow house and cottage, the matching privy with its modest hedge of lilacs, the brown, weathered boards of the garage and adjoining sheds, the elderberry bushes along the fence, as if he had never really seen any of them before. He took to coming into our cottage at unexpected moments. "He wanders in, lifts all the lids on the pans on the stove, and walks out again," Mom told Dad after supper one evening.

A month after he had been retired, Grandfather was offered a job as janitor at the church in the next block. To everyone's surprise, he accepted. It lasted less than three weeks. He came stomping into the yard at midmorning, a spot of color on each high cheekbone. "I'll be no flunkey for a batch of bossy females!" was all he ever said about that.

More and more, he simply sat; in good weather on the front porch in the red metal lawn chair, on cold days in his rocker before the bay window in the livingroom. Often, he lay on the ornate brass bed in his and Grandmother's bedroom, staying there for hours at a time, sleeping or looking up at the ceiling.

Meanwhile, quietly, almost guiltily, Mom and Grandmother contacted the state welfare board and began the long, red-taped humiliation that would result in old age pensions for Grandfather and Grandmother. (Minus the valuation of the house and the rental of the cottage, minus the monthly munificence of that \$22.50,

but, in the end, enough—almost—to live on.)

Grandfather took to quarreling a lot—with Grandmother over trifles—but mostly, whenever he could manage it, with Dad. There had always been this antagonism between them, but now it seemed to infuriate him to see Dad going off to work each morning—even to a job Grandfather despised—while he must stay at home. “I can’t open my mouth that he doesn’t start an argument,” Dad protested. With all that empty time on his hands, Grandfather seemed to relish disagreement, to seek it out. He wore his irritation like a badge, warning others away from him. His presence, broody and disapproving, became so oppressive that the kids who came to play with me—and I, too, took to avoiding him.

One Friday afternoon after school, I retreated behind the privy to begin a project I had been mulling over for several days. My growing unhappiness with having to live in the cottage had triggered some vague plan to build a shack of my own, a hide-away. I collected tools, boards, a pair of rickety sawhorses, and set to work. Soon I was immersed in the pleasure of working with hammer and saw, dreaming of what I would make from my few boards and a canful of nails. Bent to my task, feeling the warm November sun on my shoulders, smelling the fresh-cut wood under my saw, I was—for the first time in many months—at ease with my world, content.

“What are you doing out here? And where did you get that board?”

The saw caught with a ripping sound as, startled, I looked up into Grandfather’s disapproving face.

We confronted each other in a hostile silence. Then, “I was just

making something,” I mumbled.

“You’re pretty rough on that saw,” Grandfather said, more mildly.

“It’s not your saw! It’s Dad’s saw. He said I could use it.”

That was true. I had been using my father’s tools for as long as I could remember.

“And the board?”

I looked down at the weathered, heavy plank. It had come from Grandfather’s hoard of wood, iron, and broken tools heaped in the far corner of the backyard.

“I got it off that pile of junk,” I said defiantly, cornered by his accusing gaze.

“A boy your age shouldn’t be playing with good wood and tools—”

“I’ve been making things for years! Dad lets me use his tools whenever I want to.”

“If I were your father—”

“Well, you’re not!”

I stared at him, shocked by my own insolence. What either of us might have said after that I don’t know, for my father came in from the alley carrying his black tin lunch bucket. His brown cord pants and the old black suit coat and gray felt hat were covered with dust and he looked tired, but he walked in that jaunty, over-erect way he had that made Grandfather call him “the cocky little Irishman.”

We could see that he had heard our voices from the alley. He nodded to Grandfather, then said, “Making something, Bud?”

“He’s been sawing up a perfectly good plank—”

“Bud has been using tools for a long time. Besides, that’s my saw. I told him he could use it.”

“It’s my board.”

Dad looked at him for a moment. I saw the muscle along his jaw flick-

er and tighten. "Were you going to use it for something?"

"You never know when a board like that will come in handy."

"Well, Bud," Dad turned to me with the elaborate formality he used when he was especially angry, "next time you want to make something, be very sure you use one of our boards."

Before Grandfather could say anything else, Dad added in a voice I had heard him use before to recall them both from the brink of total hostility, "Now, then, why don't we fix that leak in the garage roof while there's still enough light?"

Grandfather blinked. "I'll get my tools," he said finally.

Dad handed me his lunch bucket. "Bud, take this in and get me my hammer and my can of nails." The emphasis on *my* was ever so slight.

When I got back with the hammer and nails, Dad and Grandfather were at the back of the big old wooden structure we called a garage, although it was used chiefly to store furniture, tools, and a herd of hump-backed old trunks. The first heavy snowstorm had found its way through the sagging roof at one corner. Dad was on the ladder, with Grandfather standing below, looking up at him. I climbed halfway up the ladder and handed Dad the hammer and nails. Then, very quietly, while they worked on the roof, I took Dad's tools into the house, put the sawhorses back against the fence, and returned the two pieces of plank to Grandfather's pile.

By that time, Dad had finished on the roof and he and Grandfather had gone inside the garage. I could hear their voices. Dad was saying, "This section is just about ready to cave in."

"I've been going to fix that one of these days," Grandfather declared.

I wandered in to watch.

The garage was fast filling with shadows. The air smelled of damp wood, old leather trunks, and dust. Dad lay on his back on the ladder, which was braced against a beam, trying to fit an old two-by-four into place to support the sagging roof. His hat had fallen off, and there were drops of sweat on his face and bald head.

"That two-by-four will never work," Grandfather told him.

Dad twisted around on the ladder and glared down at him. "Bud, hand me those nails."

I handed up the can.

"Those nails aren't the right size to do the job," Grandfather informed him. "You need number twenties."

"Well, have you got some?"

"No."

"Then these will have to do." Dad pounded them in, one after the other, his hammer blows becoming louder and fiercer with every stroke. In his impatience, he hit one of the nails at an angle, and it bent with a sound of rending wood. He swore under his breath.

"Told you those nails weren't big enough," Grandfather said.

"Bud!" Dad roared. "Push that blasted door back farther and let in some light."

I ran to shove back the heavy door. It scraped along the dirt, hinges squeaking. It was dusk now, and the last rays of the sun slanted across the yard. Back in the garage, it was almost dark. I went to stand beside Grandfather. Together, we peered up at Dad on the ladder in the shadows.

"It's getting too dark to see what I'm doing," Dad said between hammer blows.

I looked at Grandfather, thinking perhaps he would send me back to the house for the lantern which he kept filled with kerosene on the back porch, preferring it to the flashlight Grandmother had bought and which lay, rusting in leaking battery fluid, in the top drawer of the buffet.

Instead, he looked up at Dad, raising his eyebrows in that superior way he had so that his eyes bulged, their whites glistening against the dusk. "You can work just as well in the dark, anyway." He pronounced the words clearly and with a sort of sweet, quiet malice.

Dad's hammer stopped in midair. He stared down at Grandfather. I froze, remembering something I had heard once. Years ago, on the farm in Iowa, a man had struck Grandfather with a singletree, splitting open his forehead. No one ever knew what Grandfather had said to the man, but no one ever doubted that his words had been the cause of it.

After a long moment, Dad handed the hammer and nails down to me. Turning over, he inched his way down the ladder. At its foot, he stalked past Grandfather and out of the garage. Darting a glance at Grandfather, I scurried after him.

Dad threw the hammer and nails down on the back porch of the cottage with a crash. In the kitchen, Mom turned from the tiny coal stove at the sound. Dad shut the door behind him before he exploded.

"Dammit to hell! That man is more than I can take!"

"You know how Pa is," Mom said quickly. "Supper's ready. Don't let it get cold."

"I've tried to get along with him, dammit! I swear this is the last time I'll try to do anything around here."

Still muttering, Dad took off his coat and hat.

Mom put the meat loaf on the table. I went to the kitchen sink. As the cold water from the single tap ran over my hands, I peered through the little window above the sink. Grandfather stood on the narrow sidewalk leading to the house, staring at the cottage. For an instant, our eyes met. Then he turned and moved slowly along the walk and into the house.

The next day was a Saturday. Dad worked only until noon on Saturdays now; on his new job, he was helping to blast a road through solid granite in the mountain pass west of the city. As soon as he had left, Grandfather came out of the house. He was carrying his hammer and a can of nails. Almost furtively, it seemed to me, he headed for the garage. I heard him, later, pounding away in there, on my way to the corner grocery.

I sneaked up to the half-open door, careful not to be seen, and peeked in at him. He had moved the ladder to a precarious angle against one wall—not braced against the beam as Dad had fixed it the night before—and was leaning out, swinging his hammer in a great, angry arc at the two-by-four above and to his right.

Huh! I thought. If Dad had tried to fix it that way, you'd sure be telling him off! I turned and slipped away down the alley.

At the store, I collected the few items on Mom's list, then debated with myself over whether to invest the nickel I was allowed to spend on a cinnamon-candy apple or a Black Cow. Black Cows could be made to last all day, so I ended, as I usually did, by choosing one of the flat, hard caramel-and-chocolate suckers.

On the sidewalk, I met Ralph

father's presence, must, I can see now, have been difficult to bear. But it had not been like that the first few years.

Laurie Baxter had cut quite a dash in the country, with his cattle and hogs, his trips to St. Louis and Chicago, his planting of the first field of flax in that northern climate. He was a member of the schoolboard (always choosing the prettiest among the applicants for teacher, my mother would add, out of Grandmother's hearing), a power in the little community of Scotch, English, and Norwegian settlers.

There was another part to the story—a part which Grandmother spoke of only when Grandfather had gone out and when she herself was in one of those moods of black depression which sometimes overtook her. This part had to do with the treachery of Laurie's uncle, the foreclosure of a mortgage which forced them to sell everything at auction and leave the farm. It was this humiliation, coupled with her doctor's warning that Grandmother must seek drier air for her lungs, that sent the family westward to Colorado.

Grandfather had been forced to take any work he could get to support his growing family (three more children had been born during the years on the farm, the youngest dying of diphtheria that last, awful year)—day labor, driving a "tourist carriage," and, finally, the job at the lumberyard which was to become his life. Until now.

Now he wandered about the yard, looking at all the things the man of the house tells his wife he will fix "one of these days," a day which both know is so remote that it does not really exist for either of them. He studied the sagging garage roof. The

broken pickets on the fence. The loose screen door on the back porch. He did pound a couple of the square, unpainted pickets into place and tighten the spring on the door. But mostly he stood about the yard, surveying the bright yellow house and cottage, the matching privy with its modest hedge of lilacs, the brown, weathered boards of the garage and adjoining sheds, the elderberry bushes along the fence, as if he had never really seen any of them before. He took to coming into our cottage at unexpected moments. "He wanders in, lifts all the lids on the pans on the stove, and walks out again," Mom told Dad after supper one evening.

A month after he had been retired, Grandfather was offered a job as janitor at the church in the next block. To everyone's surprise, he accepted. It lasted less than three weeks. He came stomping into the yard at midmorning, a spot of color on each high cheekbone. "I'll be no flunkie for a batch of bossy females!" was all he ever said about that.

More and more, he simply sat; in good weather on the front porch in the red metal lawn chair, on cold days in his rocker before the bay window in the livingroom. Often, he lay on the ornate brass bed in his and Grandmother's bedroom, staying there for hours at a time, sleeping or looking up at the ceiling.

Meanwhile, quietly, almost guiltily, Mom and Grandmother contacted the state welfare board and began the long, red-taped humiliation that would result in old age pensions for Grandfather and Grandmother. (Minus the valuation of the house and the rental of the cottage, minus the monthly munificence of that \$22.50,

but, in the end, enough—almost—to live on.)

Grandfather took to quarreling a lot—with Grandmother over trifles—but mostly, whenever he could manage it, with Dad. There had always been this antagonism between them, but now it seemed to infuriate him to see Dad going off to work each morning—even to a job Grandfather despised—while he must stay at home. “I can’t open my mouth that he doesn’t start an argument,” Dad protested. With all that empty time on his hands, Grandfather seemed to relish disagreement, to seek it out. He wore his irritation like a badge, warning others away from him. His presence, broody and disapproving, became so oppressive that the kids who came to play with me—and I, too, took to avoiding him.

One Friday afternoon after school, I retreated behind the privy to begin a project I had been mulling over for several days. My growing unhappiness with having to live in the cottage had triggered some vague plan to build a shack of my own, a hide-away. I collected tools, boards, a pair of rickety sawhorses, and set to work. Soon I was immersed in the pleasure of working with hammer and saw, dreaming of what I would make from my few boards and a canful of nails. Bent to my task, feeling the warm November sun on my shoulders, smelling the fresh-cut wood under my saw, I was—for the first time in many months—at ease with my world, content.

“What are you doing out here? And where did you get that board?”

The saw caught with a ripping sound as, startled, I looked up into Grandfather’s disapproving face.

We confronted each other in a hostile silence. Then, “I was just

making something,” I mumbled.

“You’re pretty rough on that saw,” Grandfather said, more mildly.

“It’s not your saw! It’s Dad’s saw. He said I could use it.”

That was true. I had been using my father’s tools for as long as I could remember.

“And the board?”

I looked down at the weathered, heavy plank. It had come from Grandfather’s hoard of wood, iron, and broken tools heaped in the far corner of the backyard.

“I got it off that pile of junk,” I said defiantly, cornered by his accusing gaze.

“A boy your age shouldn’t be playing with good wood and tools—”

“I’ve been making things for years! Dad lets me use his tools whenever I want to.”

“If I were your father—”

“Well, you’re not!”

I stared at him, shocked by my own insolence. What either of us might have said after that I don’t know, for my father came in from the alley carrying his black tin lunch bucket. His brown cord pants and the old black suit coat and gray felt hat were covered with dust and he looked tired, but he walked in that jaunty, over-erect way he had that made Grandfather call him “the cocky little Irishman.”

We could see that he had heard our voices from the alley. He nodded to Grandfather, then said, “Making something, Bud?”

“He’s been sawing up a perfectly good plank—”

“Bud has been using tools for a long time. Besides, that’s my saw. I told him he could use it.”

“It’s my board.”

Dad looked at him for a moment. I saw the muscle along his jaw flick-

er and tighten. "Were you going to use it for something?"

"You never know when a board like that will come in handy."

"Well, Bud," Dad turned to me with the elaborate formality he used when he was especially angry, "next time you want to make something, be very sure you use one of our boards."

Before Grandfather could say anything else, Dad added in a voice I had heard him use before to recall them both from the brink of total hostility, "Now, then, why don't we fix that leak in the garage roof while there's still enough light?"

Grandfather blinked. "I'll get my tools," he said finally.

Dad handed me his lunch bucket. "Bud, take this in and get me my hammer and my can of nails." The emphasis on *my* was ever so slight.

When I got back with the hammer and nails, Dad and Grandfather were at the back of the big old wooden structure we called a garage, although it was used chiefly to store furniture, tools, and a herd of hump-backed old trunks. The first heavy snowstorm had found its way through the sagging roof at one corner. Dad was on the ladder, with Grandfather standing below, looking up at him. I climbed halfway up the ladder and handed Dad the hammer and nails. Then, very quietly, while they worked on the roof, I took Dad's tools into the house, put the sawhorses back against the fence, and returned the two pieces of plank to Grandfather's pile.

By that time, Dad had finished on the roof and he and Grandfather had gone inside the garage. I could hear their voices. Dad was saying, "This section is just about ready to cave in."

"I've been going to fix that one of these days," Grandfather declared.

I wandered in to watch.

The garage was fast filling with shadows. The air smelled of damp wood, old leather trunks, and dust. Dad lay on his back on the ladder, which was braced against a beam, trying to fit an old two-by-four into place to support the sagging roof. His hat had fallen off, and there were drops of sweat on his face and bald head.

"That two-by-four will never work," Grandfather told him.

Dad twisted around on the ladder and glared down at him. "Bud, hand me those nails."

I handed up the can.

"Those nails aren't the right size to do the job," Grandfather informed him. "You need number twenties."

"Well, have you got some?"

"No."

"Then these will have to do." Dad pounded them in, one after the other, his hammer blows becoming louder and fiercer with every stroke. In his impatience, he hit one of the nails at an angle, and it bent with a sound of rending wood. He swore under his breath.

"Told you those nails weren't big enough," Grandfather said.

"Bud!" Dad roared. "Push that blasted door back farther and let in some light."

I ran to shove back the heavy door. It scraped along the dirt, hinges squeaking. It was dusk now, and the last rays of the sun slanted across the yard. Back in the garage, it was almost dark. I went to stand beside Grandfather. Together, we peered up at Dad on the ladder in the shadows.

"It's getting too dark to see what I'm doing," Dad said between hammer blows.

I looked at Grandfather, thinking perhaps he would send me back to the house for the lantern which he kept filled with kerosene on the back porch, preferring it to the flashlight Grandmother had bought and which lay, rusting in leaking battery fluid, in the top drawer of the buffet.

Instead, he looked up at Dad, raising his eyebrows in that superior way he had so that his eyes bulged, their whites glistening against the dusk. "You can work just as well in the dark, anyway." He pronounced the words clearly and with a sort of sweet, quiet malice.

Dad's hammer stopped in midair. He stared down at Grandfather. I froze, remembering something I had heard once. Years ago, on the farm in Iowa, a man had struck Grandfather with a singletree, splitting open his forehead. No one ever knew what Grandfather had said to the man, but no one ever doubted that his words had been the cause of it.

After a long moment, Dad handed the hammer and nails down to me. Turning over, he inched his way down the ladder. At its foot, he stalked past Grandfather and out of the garage. Darting a glance at Grandfather, I scurried after him.

Dad threw the hammer and nails down on the back porch of the cottage with a crash. In the kitchen, Mom turned from the tiny coal stove at the sound. Dad shut the door behind him before he exploded.

"Dammit to hell! That man is more than I can take!"

"You know how Pa is," Mom said quickly. "Supper's ready. Don't let it get cold."

"I've tried to get along with him, dammit! I swear this is the last time I'll try to do anything around here."

Still muttering, Dad took off his coat and hat.

Mom put the meat loaf on the table. I went to the kitchen sink. As the cold water from the single tap ran over my hands, I peered through the little window above the sink. Grandfather stood on the narrow sidewalk leading to the house, staring at the cottage. For an instant, our eyes met. Then he turned and moved slowly along the walk and into the house.

The next day was a Saturday. Dad worked only until noon on Saturdays now; on his new job, he was helping to blast a road through solid granite in the mountain pass west of the city. As soon as he had left, Grandfather came out of the house. He was carrying his hammer and a can of nails. Almost furtively, it seemed to me, he headed for the garage. I heard him, later, pounding away in there, on my way to the corner grocery.

I sneaked up to the half-open door, careful not to be seen, and peeked in at him. He had moved the ladder to a precarious angle against one wall—not braced against the beam as Dad had fixed it the night before—and was leaning out, swinging his hammer in a great, angry arc at the two-by-four above and to his right.

Huh! I thought. *If Dad had tried to fix it that way, you'd sure be telling him off!* I turned and slipped away down the alley.

At the store, I collected the few items on Mom's list, then debated with myself over whether to invest the nickel I was allowed to spend on a cinnamon-candy apple or a Black Cow. Black Cows could be made to last all day, so I ended, as I usually did, by choosing one of the flat, hard caramel-and-chocolate suckers.

On the sidewalk, I met Ralph

troubling incidents I had just witnessed, but the bed was soft and warm after the chill night air, and soon I drifted into sleep.

Next day was Sunday. Grandfather rose late, dressed, and came to the table for breakfast. He ate two soft-boiled eggs with toast and drank three cups of steaming hot tea with milk and sugar. He was clear-eyed and like his old self. Although Dr. Hamilton had told us that recovery, when it came, would be like this, we could scarcely keep from staring, amazed and grateful for the change. It was as if last night—or, indeed, the past six months—had never happened. To me, it seemed as if last night's nightmare scene had somehow signaled both an end to Grandfather's illness and his own renunciation of further rebellion against life's defeats and the inevitable fact of old age.

He went into the livingroom, picked up the morning paper, and read quickly through the headlines. In a little while, he went out the front door. Dad, who had been painting Grandmother's house in his spare time the last few weeks, was hard at work on that section of wall adjoining the front porch. Catching sight of him, Grandfather walked out to stand behind him.

Dad became aware of his presence after a time. Pleased to see him up and around and looking almost like his old self, Dad beamed. "Looks pretty nice, doesn't it?" he asked, standing back to admire the gleaming stretch of crisp yellow wall.

Grandfather studied Dad's paint job in silence. Finally he said, "That yellow paint shows brush strokes pretty bad if you aren't careful." He looked at Dad, eyes bulging, as if to make sure Dad was aware he had been stung.

Dad turned to stare at him, open-mouthed. Slow fury rose over his features, and he clenched the paint brush as if he would hurl it at the old man. With an effort, he turned back to the house and began to paint once more, attacking the house with long, angry strokes.

Grandfather, satisfied that his words had struck home, went slowly up the walk. On the porch, he settled himself comfortably in the red metal lawn chair. Hands folded, he watched the traffic passing on the avenue.

He was never really strong again; he was an old man. But if he came to accept this, he never surrendered. He was as obstinate, as acid-tongued, as proud and difficult to live with as he had always been, until his death following a broken hip at eighty-four.

I never understood him then. As a boy, there were times when I was sure I did not even like him. But looking back, as I myself grow older, I begin to see him more clearly, to know him a little—and to understand. Broken by fate and treachery, depression and despair, by old age and approaching death, he stood firm, refusing stubbornly, bitterly, with a proud and furious obstinance, to surrender.

Stages of Death

• John Fandel

An ancient cemetery
Converted to a park
In the center of a city:
Flagstones cover the graves;
Oak benches stand in front of
Moved gravestones cemented flat
Against the new brick walls;
Petunias fill two beds
Of the redesigned place to rest.
Stretched out on one of the benches
Just long enough for his length,
A man in an overcoat
Too big for him, worn out,
Sleeps in the August sun;
Long hair and thick beard hide
The features of his face.
On the next bench hunches
Another man, face hidden
In his outworn coat
Collar turned up in August
Sun. Behind them, blur
Names on the rainworn stones.
The sun makes little shadows
Of petunias on the flagstones.

The Shy Lovers

• John A. Lynch

We embrace where the fair wood windflower
Rustles in the fair wood wind,
While far on the wild shore the fisherman
Tars his boat and eyes the season in the sky.
A heron tumbles,
Water spills,
And there the sunfish spawns,
A nest blown in the bottom sand.
The rough bank falls from the fair wood
And the windflower stirs as we brush by.

Mr. Acton's Final Role

• Todd Rolf Zeiss

As the curtain fell on the final performance of Shakespeare's *Richard the Second*, Roger Acton, who had played King Richard, took the hand of his queen, consort, and leading lady, Winnona Grey, ten years his senior, and that of his arch rival, Winston Steele, formerly Bolingbroke, and stepped toward the center of the stage. Through the heavy veils he could hear the muffled applause of the audience, and as the curtain rose, the thunder of the ovation rolled in upon the stage, engulfing the three actors. Roger shook hands with Steele, then turned and bowed to Miss Grey, who responded with a deep curtsy. As the curtain fell, the entire cast came forward and the curtain rose again. Again the applause, the bow, the curtsy. Down came the curtain. When it rose for the third time, Roger moved to the front of the stage and gave his slight, hesitant bow which seemed to say, "I really don't deserve this ovation . . . I haven't truly earned it . . . You're so kind, so very kind . . .," the bow whose apparent humility had quickly endeared him to his audiences. The curtain fell and rose, fell and rose again and again. As it did so, Roger remained in his place, allowing the applause to wash over him in successive waves.

It was a triumph, not only for Harry Brandeis, the director, who had proved with this final series that Shakespeare repertory could succeed, but also for Roger, who had begun

the series six months ago as a completely unknown actor and whose name was now on the lips of every theatregoer in New York. As the roar of the applause swept over him, Roger smiled. He had made it, he thought. After almost nine years, he had made it. Finally, according to pre-arrangement, the curtain rose and remained aloft. Roger moved a few feet to one side, gave a quarter-turn, and extended his arm in a sweeping, magnanimous gesture to the rest of the cast. He then walked toward the opposite side, beckoning to Harry Brandeis, who quickly stepped out, shook Roger's hand, and hurried off-stage. The applause continued. Roger remained on stage, executing from time to time his shy, abbreviated bow and bathing himself in the adulation of the audience. He deserved it, he thought. Never had he acted so well as in this production. And tonight, especially, he had been good. Really good! So deeply immersed in the part had he become that he had completely set aside his own identity and adopted that of Richard, moved and spoken as Richard. And when he had come to the grave soliloquy . . .

Still the applause continued. Roger was overwhelmed. As he had planned in advance, he moved to the edge of the stage and raised his hands in an appeal for silence. The audience quieted. But as Roger began to speak, instead of the few well-chosen words of thanks he had so carefully re-

heard, there issued from his lips an incoherent tangle of vowels and consonants. Puzzled, he stopped, got hold of himself, and began again. Again there came forth only a confused and unrelated jumble of sounds. Helpless, perplexed, and somewhat frightened, Roger extended his hands in a mute appeal for help. Interpreting Roger's actions as those of a man completely overcome by emotion, the audience burst again into applause.

The curtain fell for the last time, and Roger, bewildered, left the stage. As he moved toward his dressing room, Steele fell in beside him. "Well, you did it again, Golden Boy," he snarled and then moved off. A moment later Winnie rushed up. "You were *magnificent*, darling, simply *magnificent*," she gushed. "Don't forget, we're going to Harry's party tonight. My dressing room in half an hour?" Roger nodded and Winnie swept away.

Roger entered his dressing room, sat down before his make-up table, and, still perplexed by his inability to speak, stared at his reflection in the large plate-glass mirror. He moved his lips to speak, but hesitated, fearing that the occurrence of a few moments ago might repeat itself. Instead, he simply stared, noting that his beard needed trimming and that his face, in spite of its make-up, looked worn and tired. Screwing up his courage, he tried once more to speak. "'Our holy lives must win a new world's crown,'" he recited, "'Which our profane hours here . . .'" Breathing a deep sigh of relief, Roger sat back and contemplated the royal personage in the mirror. "Poor old Richard." He had unusual difficulty removing the lid from the jar of cold cream and discovered that his hands had fallen

asleep. "Must have pinched a nerve somewhere," he mumbled as he scooped out a glob of cold cream and smeared it on his right cheek. As he began vigorously to rub it in, he sensed that something was wrong and gradually became aware that his cheek, too, was asleep. He stopped. Slowly, tenderly, he patted his cheek with his fingertips.

"Darling," Winnie cried as she burst through the door, "whatever is keeping you? It's over forty-five minutes . . ." She stopped short. "Well, for heaven's sake!" she said with a gesture of futility. "You're not even out of your costume yet." She moved forward quickly and began to unfasten the hooks down the back of his doublet. Then, seeing him fumble with the cold cream, she said, "Here, give me that," and snatched the jar from him. She turned him around and began smearing the slippery cream onto his face. The sight of Winnie, her entire being set in vibrant motion as she energetically massaged his cheeks and forehead, so amused Roger that he forgot completely about the lack of feeling in his hands and cheek, nor did he take notice of the fact that he had been sitting in almost complete idleness for nearly forty-five minutes.

He chuckled to himself as he watched Winnie's movements. Six months ago she would not have done this, nor would she have come looking for him had he been late. Six months ago their affair had been more formal, more closely governed by the rules which supposedly controlled the mistress-lover relationship. She would have waited for him to come to her, and had he been a minute or two late, she would have thrown herself into a peevish, petulant state and forced him to woo her

out of it. But as Roger's career began to rise and Winnie's to decline, their relationship became less and less formal, and Winnie gradually abandoned her role as *grande dame* and became more human. She demanded less and gave more, and Roger slowly came to regard her, not with awe, but with a warm, comfortable amusement. Their affair was coming to an end; he knew it and she knew it. But it was a gradual termination, not violent or abrupt. Some small incident, a phrase, perhaps, a single word, or even an unfortunate glance would signal its end. There would be no recriminations. They would part as friends and always have a warm regard for one another. It amused him now to see her snatch in rapid succession one tissue after another to wipe the mixture of greasepaint, powder, and cold cream from his face, and he could not resist the impulse to pull her to his lap and cover her throat and bosom with quick, staccato kisses.

"Stop that, you naughty boy!" Winnie said with a false peevishness, allowing him to continue for a moment before pushing herself away. "Now hurry and get dressed. We're terribly late."

As Roger peeled off his costume and began putting on his tuxedo, Winnie, her back modestly turned, began to repeat some of the gossip which had been going around backstage.

"They tell me Harry is planning to do *Lear* next," she said. Before Roger could reply, she continued, "I think that's horribly unfair of him. Especially after *Richard*. He'll want you to do *Lear*, of course. But what about me?"

"Cordelia," Roger said without thinking. Winnie whirled about. "Oh,

Roger, stop it!" she said, genuinely peeved.

Startled, Roger looked up, then realized what he had said. Harry, of course, would not cast Winnie as Cordelia. She was no longer young enough nor beautiful enough. And the last six months had been extremely hard on her. For a moment Winnie and Roger looked at each other, the one imploring mercy, the other forgiveness. Embarrassed, Roger looked away, fumbling with his cufflinks.

"Let me help you," Winnie said, moving to him.

She inserted the links, snapped them in place, and began working on his shirt studs. Roger stood like a chastened little boy, his hands hanging at his sides. He felt a strong urge to pull her to him and comfort her, but he knew that would be exactly the wrong thing to do. "I doubt that I could play *Lear*, anyway," he finally said. "I'm not ready for it. I couldn't get into it." Winnie inserted the last of the studs. "You know," he continued, "I've an inkling to do *Othello*, and I think you'd make a marvelous *Desdemona*. Would you like that?" He took Winnie by the shoulders and tried to pull her to him, but she resisted.

"That would be nice," she said.

By the time they reached Brandeis's apartment, the party was well under way. Winston Steele, who became buoyant after one martini and sullen after a second, was just finishing his third as Roger and Winnie entered. "Well," he exclaimed with mock surprise, "so you've condescended to grace our humble gathering with your magnificent presence after all, Winnie dear. What a noble gesture," and he made them a grandiloquent courtier's bow.

"Don't be adolescent, Winston," Winnie said coldly and swept past him into the room.

As Roger moved to follow her, Steele fell in at his shoulder and mumbled between clenched teeth, "Damned nice of you, Acton, I must say, mixing with the plebeians before adjourning to the royal bedchamber."

"Shut up," Roger said curtly and would have moved ahead had not Steele grabbed him by the arm.

"Just remember, sonny-boy," Steele said, flashing a mouthful of even white teeth, "I was there before you, and there were several ahead of me."

Chagrined, Roger made no reply, but broke loose from Steele and hurried after Winnie.

On a large, round coffee-table in the center of the livingroom a prop girl, who had kicked off her shoes and pulled down one of the draperies, wrapping it around her in sari-like fashion, was doing a sort of Balinese-Hawaiian dance to a thumping accompaniment slapped out on the edge of the table by the chief lighting technician. Others stood about the table, clapping with the rhythmic thumps and shouting brief snatches of encouragement to the impromptu performer as she twisted sinuously, her bare feet smacking the table top and with an expression on her face which vacillated between intense agony and extreme ecstasy. Small knots of people stood about the room drinking, smoking, and chattering. On the divan and in the large easy chairs sprawled amorous couples passionately making love without regard for, and apparently quite unaware of, the noises and confusion which surrounded them. Above everything hung an undulating cloud of grayish-white cigarette smoke, an arm of which oc-

asionally dipped down to be swirled about the moving guests and then, dissipated, rose toward the ceiling. A continuous noise which, to Roger, seemed very much like the roar of the sea breaking and receding along a stretch of sandy beach, drowned out the sound of individual voices and conversations and was broken now and then by a bright splash of female laughter. From somewhere there came an occasional burst of music, but before Roger could locate its source, he spotted Winnie and Brandeis in a corner, talking with one of the associate producers. Roger started toward them, picking up a drink on the way. As he passed the coffee-table, the prop girl spotted him. "Roger!" she shrieked, jumping from her platform and throwing her arms and half the drapery about him. "Dance with me, Roger," she breathed, writhing against him. "Your beard tickles," she giggled. To accommodate her and her audience, Roger shuffled a few steps, then extricated himself, and, turning, bumped into Steele.

"Too young for you?" Steele asked, grinning. "Or couldn't she stand your hairy face?"

Roger fought the impulse to smash Steele in his even, white teeth, stepped around him, and hurried over to Winnie and Brandeis. As he had guessed, they were discussing the new series of plays.

"Oh, Roger! It's true!" Winnie cried with anguish, as he stepped up to the group. "Harry's planning to do *Lear*, and nothing I say will change his mind."

"I can't see why I should," Brandeis said. "We've had a terrific run with *Richard*, better than anyone thought possible. And an audience that likes *Richard* will like *Lear*."

"An audience doesn't know what

it likes," snorted Winnie. "All it likes is a name. Give it a name or two, and it'll think it's seen something wonderful. My God, Harry! Think of some of the plays we did five years ago. Trash! Nothin but trash! Did the audience care? Not a bit. All it cared about was that you were the director and I was the star. They loved us. We could have produced the worst, rottenest, most horrible plays we could put our hands on, and they'd still have come. And they still would, because they still love you and they still love me."

"That's no argument against producing *Lear*," Brandeis replied coolly.

"But *Lear* . . ." sputtered Winnie. "What about me . . ."

"Perhaps we could do *Othello*," Roger put in, somewhat vexed at having been left out of Winnie's hierarchy of love, but holding to his promise.

"We could," Brandeis replied. "But why not *Lear*?"

"I don't think I could do *Lear*," said Roger.

"Did I hear correctly?" Steele said, stepping into the group. "Did the boy wonder say he couldn't do something?"

"Cool it, Bill," Brandeis snapped. "What do you mean, Roger, you don't think you can do it?"

"I'm simply not ready yet, that's all," Roger said. He had entered the argument half-heartedly, but Steele's intrusion provoked him. "I don't know *Lear* well enough," he continued, his temper rising. "I don't understand him. I can't quite grasp his thought, his feelings. *Othello*, yes. I could do *Othello*. I could give you an *Othello* that would make Gielgud envious and Olivier pale. I understand *Othello*, his enviable innocence in a decadent world, his passion for

Desdemona, his anger and frustration when he thinks he's been betrayed . . . but *Lear*? How could I portray *Lear*?"

"By doing as I tell you," said Brandeis abruptly.

"You don't understand," Roger continued, now completely absorbed in his own argument. "I have to *know* the character before I can portray him. I have to think the way *he* thinks, feel the way *he* feels. I can't just mouth words or make empty gestures. I have to know what's behind them."

"You young actors make me sick," blurted Steele. "You're all alike, every goddam one of you. You take a simple, straightforward job of acting and turn it into some sort of mystical rite. 'I have to *feel* the part. I have to *become* the character. Bull. All you have to do is speak the words and go through the motions . . . that's all, words and motions."

"For you, maybe," Roger replied. "But not for me. For me there's got to be more. I've got to . . ." And suddenly from his lips there burst a torrent of jumbled and incoherent sounds. He stopped, horrified. Brandeis, Steele, and Winnie looked at him with surprise. He began again, and again there issued from his lips nothing but a twisted skein of meaningless noise. Roger grew faint. He felt as if he were on a merry-go-round with Winnie, Steele, and Brandeis whirling past him. He grew dizzy and reached out to Brandeis for support. For a moment he thought he was floating and from a great distance he heard Winnie cry, "Roger!"

Slowly, ever so slowly, Roger became aware of the blackness. It was as if he were in a hole, a frighteningly deep hole, and there was no light and everything was black. It

took great effort to maintain his grasp on this fact and not to slip from the blackness again into nothingness. But to do that, he realized, would be to slide backwards, and it had taken too much energy to get where he was now. Again, he felt as if he were floating, going neither up nor down, but simply floating. And then he began to rise, slowly at first, then more quickly. He was moving up, up out of the hole, out of that God-awful deep hole, up toward the light. The light grew brighter. It seemed terribly, wonderfully bright. He became excited. He wanted to rush upward into the light. Suddenly something hovered over him, something white between him and the light. He became confused, frightened. He tried to cry out.

"There, there, Mr. Acton," he heard a female voice say. "Relax. Gently, now, gently."

Roger opened his eyes. He saw a clouded image. With an effort he drew the image into focus and realized with some surprise that he was looking at a nun.

"Well, Mr. Acton," she said, smiling pleasantly, "you're back with us once again." Roger tried to speak, but his throat and mouth were so parched that all he could manage was a dry hiss. "Would you care for some water?" Roger nodded, and the nun lifted a metal cup with a glass drinking straw to his lips. Roger drew on the straw and felt the tingle of cool water flood his mouth and trickle down his throat. He coughed slightly. "Enough?" asked the nun.

"Yes. Thank you," he said hoarsely.

"Lie still now," said the nun. "There's an intravenous in your arm, and you don't want to disturb it. I think Dr. Marsh is still in the building; I'll go get him." After making

a quick check of the intravenous and smoothing an imaginary wrinkle out of the bedclothes, the nun left.

Roger looked slowly about the room. It was small. The walls were a pale green color, and drapes of a darker green bordered the single window, in front of which a rack of venetian blinds had been lowered and partially closed to dim the light. There was a metal armchair upholstered in green leatherette in one corner and a dull green metal bureau along the wall opposite the window. A smaller chair stood by the bed. The entire impression was one of cool efficiency and utter drabness. As he looked about the room, Roger's vision was arrested by the rather large crucifix hanging on the wall opposite the foot of his bed. Graphic in every detail, the emaciated, bloody Christ stared down at him with sunken, compassionate eyes.

"Oh, God!" Roger muttered to himself, too exhausted to formulate the rest of his thought.

A moment later the nun returned, followed by a young man in white. "This is Dr. Marsh," she said, and once again began fussing with the bedclothes.

"How do you feel, Mr. Acton?" the doctor asked. "Tired?" Roger nodded. "I imagine so," the doctor continued. "You've had us all a bit worried." While talking, the doctor slipped a thermometer into Roger's mouth, gently grasped his wrist, and began taking his pulse. "Very good," he said, putting on his stethoscope. "Uh-huh," he said, moving the stethoscope swiftly about Roger's chest. "Uh-huh. Very good, indeed," he muttered, more to himself than to Roger. He removed the stethoscope, slipped it in his coat pocket, removed the thermometer, and glanced at it.

"Very good," he said, shaking it down. "Are you hungry?"

"A bit," Roger replied.

"I imagine so," the doctor said, moving to the foot of the bed and making a few notations on the chart which hung there. "I think we'll give you soup for supper," he said, nodding to the nun, who quickly left the room. "How's that sound?"

"Supper?" Roger said, puzzled.

"Why, yes," the doctor replied. "It's nearly six o'clock." He moved to the side of the bed and placed his hand on Roger's shoulder. "You've been unconscious for nearly eighteen hours."

It took a moment for the words to sink in. "Then today's . . ."

"Monday," said the doctor. "Tell me," he continued, "what is the last thing you remember?"

Roger tried to think back, to remember what had happened before the blackness and that God-awful deep hole. "I don't know," he said. "I can't seem to recall anything."

"Try," the doctor said. "Try very hard."

Roger tried again, straining his memory to the utmost. There was the blackness. And the hole. And before that? Certain vague undulating images swam into his consciousness. A girl, barefooted, wrapped in a filmy train, floated before his eyes. "Dance with me, Roger," she said in a sultry, drawn-out tone, "dance with me." And he saw a sardonic smile and a set of gleaming white teeth and his fist, describing an arc, moving in agonizing slow-motion toward the teeth, and then both the fist and the teeth faded. And he saw Winnie, vaguely, at first, then clearly. "They love me," she was saying in an hysterical voice. "They love me . . . love me . . . me . . . me . . ."

"The party," Roger said. "I was at a party. We were arguing."

"Had you been drinking?" the doctor asked.

"No," Roger replied, the images flooding back into his memory. "I had a drink in my hand, but I hadn't drunk anything yet."

"Now tell me, Mr. Acton," the doctor said, "do you remember any unusual physical sensations?"

"Dizziness," Roger replied. "Just before I passed out, I became terribly dizzy. We were arguing and suddenly I couldn't speak."

"Not at all?"

"I could speak, but it didn't make any sense. It came out all garbled."

"I see. Anything else? How about before the party?"

Roger thought back. "The cold cream," he said. "My hands fell asleep and I couldn't open the cold cream jar."

"I see," the doctor said again. "I'd like to run a brief test, if I may." Taking a pen from his breast pocket, he unscrewed the top. He pulled back the bedclothes and said, "I want you to close your eyes, and when I touch you, I want you to tell me whether it's the sharp or dull end. Dull or sharp?"

Roger closed his eyes. He felt a slight prick on the bottom of his foot. "Sharp," he replied.

"Sharp or dull?"

This time there was pressure, but no pain. "Dull."

"And again?"

"Dull."

The doctor moved swiftly up Roger's legs, across his stomach, his chest, down each arm, his neck and shoulders. "Very good," he said, replacing the bedclothes. "You were correct every time."

"What's wrong with me?" Roger asked.

"I'm not certain yet," the doctor replied. "I've a pretty good idea, but I'd like to run some blood tests and an electrocardiogram first. All right?" Roger nodded. "Good. Then we'll do those tomorrow morning, and I'll be in to see you sometime in the afternoon." At this point the nun returned, wheeling a small cart on which rested a bowl of soup, some crackers, and a glass of milk. "Ah, here's your supper," the doctor said. "If it stays down, we can remove the intravenous. Don't be alarmed if you're a bit nauseated, however. It's quite normal. By the way, this is Sister Prudencia. If you require anything, please ask her. That's quite a beard you have," the doctor said as he left the room.

"I hope you like chicken-noodle," Sister Prudencia said, cranking Roger into a sitting position. "It was either that or tomato, and I didn't think you're quite ready for tomato yet." She fluffed up Roger's pillow and placed the tray on his lap. Roger grasped the spoon and started to convey the soup to his mouth. It seemed a great effort to guide the spoon forward, and he spilled most of its contents in the process. "Here, let me help you," the nun said. She picked up the bowl and deftly spooned the warm liquid into his mouth. "Cracker?" she asked. "Milk?" Roger felt completely humiliated over being reduced to such an infantile state. Within a few minutes the operation was completed. Sister Prudencia removed the tray and was again smoothing the bedclothes. Roger, embarrassed, glanced about the room. His eyes fell again on the bloody crucifix. "Is there anything else I can do?" Sister Prudencia asked.

Roger thought a moment. "Yes," he replied. "Would you mind terribly removing the crucifix? It's so realistic," he said apologetically. "I don't think I can quite . . ."

"Certainly," said the nun, smiling. She grasped the crucifix and tried to lift it from its hanger. "It seems to be stuck," she said, giving it a little jerk. She jerked again and the crucifix came free, pulling with it the hanger and a chunk of plaster and leaving a large hole in the wall. "My goodness," she said, "I've really made a mess of it, haven't I?"

"Thank you," Roger said. "Thank you very much."

The following morning Roger was dressed in a white hospital robe, placed in a wheelchair, and wheeled down to the laboratory. "You'll have to wait a few minutes," said the orderly and parked him in the corridor. A short while later, another patient was wheeled up on a rolling bed and parked against the opposite wall. Several minutes went by.

"I know you," a voice said.

Roger looked up. On the bed opposite him lay a child, a young girl, about eight or nine years old, he guessed. She was not very pretty. Indeed, she was rather ugly. Her black hair had been chopped off several inches above her shoulders and in extremely uneven bangs which exposed most of her forehead. Her lips were quite thin and of a pale blue color, and her whole complexion had a bluish-gray pallor to it. Her nose was broad and flat and distorted by an orange rubber tube thrust up her right nostril and taped across the bridge of her nose and then again to her forehead just below her bangs. Only her large, dark eyes seemed exempt from the sickly pallor which

infused the rest of her features. From where did she know him, Roger wondered. The newspapers, perhaps. His picture had been prominent the last few weeks. Or perhaps on T.V. He'd been on several of the late evening shows. He smiled.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm not certain I know you."

"I'm Mar-Jo," the girl replied in an accusing tone. "Marjory Josephine Finsterly."

Roger racked his brain, trying to establish some connection. "O-o-o-h," he finally said, pretending recognition. "Marjory Joanne Finsterly."

"Josephine," the child corrected emphatically.

"Josephine," Roger said, a bit overwhelmed by her effrontery.

The child raised herself to one elbow and eyed him closely for a minute or two.

"Are you sick?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied.

She gave him another long stare.

"I didn't know *you* could get sick," the child said.

"Yes, I can," Roger replied, assuming that, however the child had come to know him, he was obviously some sort of hero to her, and heroes aren't supposed to get sick. "I'm just like everybody else, you know."

Again the child studied him closely. "I see your hands are all better," she said.

Roger started. How in the world could she know about his hands? He stared back at the child. "Yes," he said, bewildered. "They're fine now." Perhaps she had heard some hospital gossip, he thought. Or if he were truly her hero, perhaps one of the nuns had said something to her.

"Have you been here long?" Marjory asked.

"I arrived yesterday," Roger re-

plied. "How about you?" he asked, hoping to turn the conversation. "Have you been here long?"

"Forever," the child said petulantly, flopping back on her pillows. She sighed. "I don't think I'll ever get out of here."

Her last statement sounded so forlorn, Roger felt compelled to console her. "Yes, you will," he said. "Sometimes these things take a little time."

"But I get so lonely," the child said.

"You have visitors, don't you? Your mother and father?"

"Yes," replied Josephine. "But I still get lonely." The child turned her face toward him. Large tears had welled up in her eyes. "Well," she said, smiling a little, "I guess it won't be so bad now that you're here." Her face clouded again. "You will come and visit me, won't you?"

"Of course I will," Roger said quickly.

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"Honest and true?"

"I never break a promise," Roger said.

The child smiled back again. Roger smiled back. Suddenly she frowned.

"Why isn't your hair shining?" she asked.

Puzzled, Roger ran his fingers through his rather long and now quite tousled hair.

"I haven't run a comb through it for a couple of days," he said.

"Oh," the child said, apparently satisfied.

An orderly appeared and began to wheel Roger away.

"Don't forget your promise," the child called.

"I won't," Roger replied.

"I'm in room three-o-four."

For the rest of the morning Roger was at the mercy of the hospital technicians. They drew blood from his arm, blood from his finger, took a urine specimen, x-rays, taped electrodes to him and scurried about while machines hummed and whirred and a number of styluses drew nervous lines on rolls of paper. By the time he was returned to his room, he was so exhausted he could barely eat. All thoughts of his encounter with Marjory Josephine Finsterly dropped out of his mind as he slipped into a deep and comfortable sleep. At four o'clock he was roused from his slumber by Sister Prudencia, who announced that Dr. Marsh was on his way up.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Acton," Dr. Marsh said cheerily, as he slipped a thermometer under Roger's tongue. With an automatic gesture he grasped Roger's wrist and again took his pulse. "Very good," he said. He checked the thermometer and shook it down. "I think we've discovered the problem, Mr. Acton," he began. He sat down on the foot of his bed, drawing up one knee and cradling it between his hands. "From all indications, it appears as if you've suffered a mild heart-block. Your other symptoms—loss of speech, sense of touch, and so forth—were actually secondary. Fortunately you don't seem to have incurred any permanent damage, but I suggest we keep you here for a few more days just to make certain. Your blood count is way, way up, so you're not out of the woods yet. We don't want a recurrence, now, do we?" he said, smiling.

Roger shook his head.

"Have you been under any particular tension lately?" the doctor asked.

"Not especially," Roger replied. "In fact, things have been going rather well for me."

"I see. Well, at any rate, I want you to relax and get rested up. You're coming out of this in fine shape. I don't want you to worry about a thing. I'll get a radio up here for you so you'll have some music, and I think we'll have you use a bed-pan for a few days so you won't even have to walk to the lavatory. All right?"

Roger, although chagrined at this last, agreed.

The radio and the bed-pan arrived that evening, and although Roger enjoyed the radio, especially the news programs which put him in touch again with the outside world, he found his initial trials with the bed-pan quite embarrassing, and even more so, since Sister Prudencia insisted on aiding him in his struggles with it. At first he was quite disturbed at being reduced to such an infantile state, but after a day or two he grew accustomed to this and to other dehumanizing aspects of hospital life. During the first few days he found it quite delightful to simply lie in bed and listen to the light, airy music put out by the local radio stations; and with the news every hour on the hour it soon seemed as if the natural disasters, wars, and human trivialities were all a part of some grand and well-organized scheme. Even the routine of the hospital helped to reinforce this illusion—breakfast at seven, lunch at noon, sponge bath and rub at two, Dr. Marsh at four . . . But as the days wore on, the initial restfulness and tranquillity of the situation sank into stagnant repetition. The doctor's daily reports, although always positive in tone, never indicated he was truly recovering. The wars continued day

after day without victory or the hope of peace, and those that did manage to end immediately became bogged down in the bottomless morass of political settlement. One natural disaster followed on the heels of another, and the human interest stories seemed to reflect nothing more than the inane foolishness of all human activities. Roger grew bored. He seldom turned on the radio. He ate his meals mechanically and climbed on and off the bed-pan without comment or change of expression. Most of the time he simply lay in bed, staring at the featureless ceiling or the dull green walls. For some reason his eyes would eventually focus on the hole on the opposite wall where the crucifix had been.

There was only one incident that broke the ennui.

"I met a friend of yours today," Sister Prudencia announced one day toward the end of the week, as she brought Roger his lunch.

"Oh?" Roger said, wondering which of his friends it might have been.

"A young lady," the nun said coquettishly.

Roger frowned. He knew many young ladies, but none, he thought, who would visit him in the hospital.

"Mar-Jo Finsterly," Sister Prudencia revealed.

"Oh, her," Roger said. "The little girl in the corridor." He laughed. "How is she?"

"Not very well," the nun said with a sigh, setting down his tray. "She's beginning to hemorrhage again."

"Hemorrhage," Roger said. "What is it she's got?"

"Leukemia," the nun said calmly.

The word stunned Roger. "I see," he said, quite subdued. "That's . . . too bad."

"Yes, it is," said Sister Prudencia, cranking up the bed. "She's such a sweet little thing . . . always in such good spirits." She placed the tray on his lap. "She thinks you're Jesus, you know. She's been telling everyone she talked to Jesus and He's coming to see her again. At first we thought it was her imagination, but when she described Jesus, we knew it must have been you. Because of your beard, probably."

"Probably," Roger echoed. The situation seemed amusing at first, then grotesque. It seemed absurd to Roger that anyone should mistake him for Jesus. For a moment he felt a slight twinge of vanity and mild resentment over the fact he had not been taken for himself. But as he thought about it and the ugly, petulant little girl with the rubber tube up her nose, he was deeply moved. It was quite pathetic. In a way, almost tragic. I must see her again, he thought, if only to tell her I'm not Jesus.

"Come, come," said Sister Prudencia, "eat your supper."

"I'm not very hungry," he said.

"You must eat," the nun said, "if you want to get well."

The following day he had a visitor.

"Roger, darling," Winnie gushed as she swept into the room. "How are you, dear? Much, much better, I hope. Are they taking good care of you, darling? Is there anything you need?"

The questions came in such rapid-fire order it was impossible to answer them all. "I'm getting along fine," he replied. "No, there's nothing I need."

Winnie seated herself in the metal armchair in the corner. "What a terribly tiny room," she said, looking about her. "Can't they give you a larger one?"

Roger smiled. "How are you, Winnie?" he asked.

"Fine, darling. Just fine," she replied. "I'd have been up to see you sooner, but after you became ill, Harry decided to do *Macbeth*, and we've been thrown right into it. I begged him to wait until you had recovered, but Harry's such a demon, you know. He's afraid of losing his audience."

"Thank you anyway, Winnie," Roger said, a bit put out at this piece of news. "Yes, I know Harry. Anything to fill the house."

"We've been thrown into rehearsals day and night," Winnie continued. "And I've had such terrible trouble learning my lines. It's sheer torture." Winnie opened her purse and took out a cigarette. "Oh, I suppose I mustn't smoke," she said, putting back the cigarette. "How horrible. How perfectly ghastly."

"One gets used to it," Roger said.

"There's something I must tell you, darling," Winnie said, looking about the room but carefully keeping her eyes from him. Her voice was subdued and had lost some of its affectation. "Winston and I," she said, "are engaged. We're to be married next week." She got up and walked to the window. "We're planning a surprise elopement; so you mustn't tell anyone."

"What about the play?" Roger asked.

"Oh, we'll be back in time for that," she replied. "We're planning just a weekend honeymoon."

There was a pause. Winnie remained facing the window. Roger stared blankly at the opposite wall, his gaze focusing on the hole where the crucifix had been.

"I wish you the greatest happiness," he said quietly. "Steele's a fine actor."

"Oh, darling, he really is," Winnie said, turning to face him. She grasped his hand warmly. "I knew you'd understand," she said.

"You should be very happy," he replied.

Winnie's visit disturbed Roger considerably. He was not so much bothered by the fact that she had taken a new lover—indeed, he was actually somewhat relieved—but that she had gone back to Steele. Fine actor or not, Steele was a cad. He could be ingratiating, to be sure, but he was also arrogant, nasty, and mean, and in spite of Winnie's selfishness and affectation, Roger was still too fond of her to be pleased with the news. But what irritated him even more was that Brandeis had launched another production without so much as a word to him. Not even a card. It was as if he had been totally insignificant to Brandeis's success, as if he had nothing to do with it whatever. This vexed him. And what was more, it reduced his entire achievement in the theatre to a hollow sham. If Brandeis couldn't wait a month or two before opening another play, if his audience would vanish that quickly, then how significant and meaningful was anything Roger had accomplished?

As he tossed and turned, mulling over these thoughts, he began to review his career in the theatre. He had come to New York not filled with illusions, but not without hopes either, and he had studied hard and worked long hours at anything connected with the theatre. Within a year he had begun to get bit parts and not long after that more substantial ones. And then the doldrums set in. For years he carried small parts, but never a lead, nor even a supporting role. Many of the friends he had made those first

few years began to drop off, to take other jobs, or go out to the west coast. Once he had been offered a job in a small college in Vermont. But he had stuck it out, working where he could, living where he could afford the rent and often with friends when he was broke. And finally, eight years after he had arrived in New York, he gained a supporting role in a Brandeis production, after which Harry had picked him up and groomed him for the Shakespeare repertory. What was it all worth, he wondered. He couldn't even recall a single warm, truly meaningful friendship among all those he had met and worked with. Everyone was concentrating on themselves and on the job—on the role, the set, the lighting, the costumes, on that frivolous, fascinating, fickle, infatuating, selfish, sovereign mistress, the theatre.

Roger fell into a mood of deep despondency. He ate little, listened to the doctor's reports with a deaf ear, and didn't turn on the radio. Only when Sister Prudencia said a word or two about the Finsterly girl did he take any interest in her incessant flow of small talk. Most of the time he simply lay on his back, staring at the ceiling and the blank walls. Invariably his gaze was drawn to the hole where the crucifix had been. The doctor's reports picked up a note of alarm. His blood-count hadn't gone down. He seemed tense. Was there something bothering him? He must eat more. He must try to relax . . . get some rest . . . don't think of anything . . . just relax. Roger listened to the doctor's words with sardonic amusement. What difference did it make? What was it all worth? He continued to stare at the hole.

"How old is she?" Roger asked

one day at the mention of Marjory Josephine.

"Twelve," Sister Prudencia replied.

"She seems so much younger."

"She's very much wasted," the nun said. "We expect she'll become comatose very soon."

"Is that the way they . . .?"

The nun nodded.

"I really must visit her," Roger said, more to himself than to the nun.

Sister Prudencia smiled. "That would be nice," she said. "But I'm afraid it's impossible. You may not leave your bed without the doctor's permission." She smoothed a wrinkle in the bedclothes. "You must think of yourself, Mr. Acton. You must get well." As she was about to leave the room, she turned and said, "It will cheer her to know you're thinking of her."

"I hope you've told her I'm not Jesus," Roger replied.

"We were going to," she said, "but we hadn't the heart."

"You must, you know."

"I suppose so," she said, leaving the room.

Roger lay back on the bed. He didn't know why, but the news about the Finsterly girl distressed him. Was it because of his promise? He didn't have to keep it, he knew. It was practically forced out of him. Not by the girl, but by the situation. The whole set-up hadn't really been fair. Who could possibly have said *no*? Or was it because he had been forced into a role he could not possibly fulfill? He tried not to think about it, to turn his mind to other matters. He thought of Winnie and immediately of Steele. A flame of anger rose within him. He quickly turned his mind to Brandeis and the new production. He'd have liked to do *Macbeth*. Why couldn't

Harry have waited. He wasn't going to be laid up forever, just another few days. What difference could a few days make? The flame rose higher, and he tried to clear his mind of all thoughts. Breathing deeply, he gazed at the ceiling for a long while and then around the room. Inevitably, as if drawn by a magnet, his vision was drawn to the hole opposite the bed. As he stared at it, it seemed to grow larger. He blinked his eyes and looked at it again. It yawned at him like some monstrous orifice eager to swallow him up. He closed his eyes. It seemed as if he were floating, as if he were being steadily pulled into that God-awful, black hole. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. My God, he thought, I'm going mad. He opened his eyes and checked the hole. It was there, yawning, sucking, drawing him in. He threw his arms across his eyes and buried his face in the pillow. Before him floated the face of the Finsterly girl. The deep, dark eyes, the flat nose with the orange rubber tube. I'm truly going mad, he thought. It isn't fair. I've got to get out of here. I must tell her.

He slipped hurriedly from the bed and was surprised to discover how weak he was. Using a chair for support, he worked his way over to the small closet and got out his hospital robe. As he fumbled to put it on, he discovered his hands had gone bad again. Finally, he got it on, and sliding one hand along the wall, he

worked his way out of the room and down the corridor. He was on the second floor. The child was in room 304. At the foot of the stairway he met a nurse. She smiled. He nodded. She passed by. Leaning on the railing, he started up. Halfway up he stopped, breathing heavily. After resting a few minutes, he continued. Another stop, and he reached the top of the stairs and began working his way down the corridor. 310 . . . 308 . . . 306 . . .

The door was open and he could see the late afternoon sun streaming in through the open blinds. Marjory lay on the bed, her face partially obscured by a plastic oxygen tent. Roger, exhausted, pulled over a chair and sat down beside the bed, his back to the window. He took hold of her hand.

The child opened her eyes. She smiled. "I knew you'd come," she said, her voice barely a whisper.

Roger smiled. He tried to tell her, but found he couldn't speak. He looked away and saw his shadow on the wall, beams of light from the setting sun radiating from it.

"Your hair is shining," the child said.

Roger tried to give her hand a slight squeeze, but found his hand was numb. The child appeared to have fallen asleep. The room began to grow dark. Roger felt very tired and a little bit dizzy. He sat quietly. Soon the room grew dark.

Contributors

GEORGE W. SMYTH graduated from the University of Texas, spent several years writing in Mexico, and has completed a novel with Mexican background; but his story in this issue is not part of it. He lives, teaches, and writes in his home town, San Antonio. JAN MICHAEL DYROFF resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts; this is his first appearance here. MICHAEL LEE, F.S.C., a student Brother at La Salle College, has had a vignette accepted which will be printed in a subsequent number of **four quarters**; "The Other War" is his first published story. JUDY DUNN has had several poems accepted by this magazine, one of which, "Toby's Scarecrow, November," appeared in the November, 1967 issue. PAUL A. DOYLE has published articles on Anglo-Irish literary figures in such journals as *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Eire-Ireland*, and last year he edited a *Concordance to the Collected Poems of James Joyce*. He is professor of English at Nassau College, Garden City, N. Y. PAUL KELLY, a La Salle junior majoring in English studies, lives in Wrightstown, New Jersey. ELIZABETH SHAFER writes from Colorado Springs that she is "a fulltime freelance writer, selling fiction, articles, and poetry in a variety of national publications including *McCall's*, *Woman's Day*, *Carleton Miscellany*, *New Mexico Quarterly*, and *The National Observer*." JOHN FANDEL, a member of the faculty of Manhattan College, New York, has contributed poetry to **four quarters** for many years. JOHN A. LYNCH is a writer living in Framingham, Massachusetts; he has frequently contributed verse and fiction to contemporary magazines. TODD R. ZEISS, Assistant Professor of English, Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio, writes of himself: "I began my writing career at Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin, where I completed a bachelor's degree in 1958. In 1960 I received a master's degree from the University of Virginia and am currently working on a master of fine arts at Iowa. 'Mr. Acton's Final Role' is to be a part of my MFA thesis."

Writers who appear in **four quarters** are eligible for awards up to \$1000 and republication in the Annual Literary Anthology scheduled to start in 1967, through the National Endowment for the Arts.

Editor, EDWARD P. SHEEKEY, F.S.C.

Associate Editors, JOHN J. KEENAN, F. PATRICK ELLIS, F.S.C.

Business Manager, CHARLES V. KELLY

Circulation Manager, RICHARD P. BOUDREAU

Typographic Cover Design by JOSEPH MINTZER

Manuscripts and other correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, **four quarters**, La Salle College, Philadelphia, Penna. 19141. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Annual Subscription: Two Dollars.
